

# Protecting the oceans' cleaners

By: 1S



Only four species of sharks, worldwide, are considered deadly. Photograph: Mrs Mussone

**Killing machines, deadly predators, maneaters. When you hear those words you think of sharks right? This is a huge misunderstanding. Did you know that some sharks have a warning dance, friendship groups and are considered the ocean's environmentalists? Read below to find out the correct facts about these magnificent creatures.**

Most people incorrectly assume sharks are killing machines but that's because they don't have the correct facts.

According to Biology Professor Culum Brown from Macquarie University, "Most of the sharks in the world don't even have pointy, bitey teeth... they have crushing teeth and they eat things like shells and crabs."

The truth is, of the 500 shark species in our oceans, only four are considered dangerous.

“The chances of you getting attacked and killed by a shark are EXTREMELY rare,” Culum Brown said.

“You’re much more likely to die some other way either by drowning when you get to the beach or killed in the car on the way to the beach, bitten by a bee, falling off a horse... even taking a selfie is more dangerous than swimming with sharks. Each year, on average sharks only kill 6 people, however, people kill more than 1 million sharks.

“Sometimes there are little blips in the data where we actually do get more shark attacks. This year there has been slightly more than usual but there have been periods of time where there are none,” Culum said.

Lastly, there are more people enjoying our oceans through swimming, boating, surfing, spear fishing and diving. This means that there is an increased likelihood that sharks will come in contact with people.



Photos of Port Jackson sharks, courtesy of Culum Brown, Johann Mourier, C Gervais and Catarina V. P.

Even with their reputation as merciless people-eaters, the fact is, sharks have a greater chance of being killed by humans. Studies have shown that 100 million sharks are being killed every year through illegal and over fishing practices brought on by the demand for shark fin.

Unfortunately, shark births can't catch up to the high rate at which sharks are being killed. This is because sharks have a very slow reproduction rate. Furthermore, sharks are swimming into fishing nets that weren't meant to catch them. This is known as bycatch and in many instances these caught sharks are dying because many sharks need to move to survive. Being tangled in a net prevents them from swimming.

There are ways the public can try to stay safe whilst swimming in the ocean. One way is to avoid going into the sea with a cut because sharks can smell blood from kilometres away. Also, be sure not to go out dressed in seal colours because seals are a food source for sharks. Instead you could go out in a colourful suit.

## Did you know?



1. Some sharks like the Port Jackson, have social groups, spending their entire lives interacting with the same bunch of friends.
2. Sharks like the Grey Reef are known to have a "threat display. This is where they arch their backs up and moves their pectoral fins down by their side and shakes.
3. Grey Reef sharks aren't allowed to stop swimming or they will die. Instead they switch off part of their brains and uses their sensors and creates strange swimming patterns whilst sleeping.