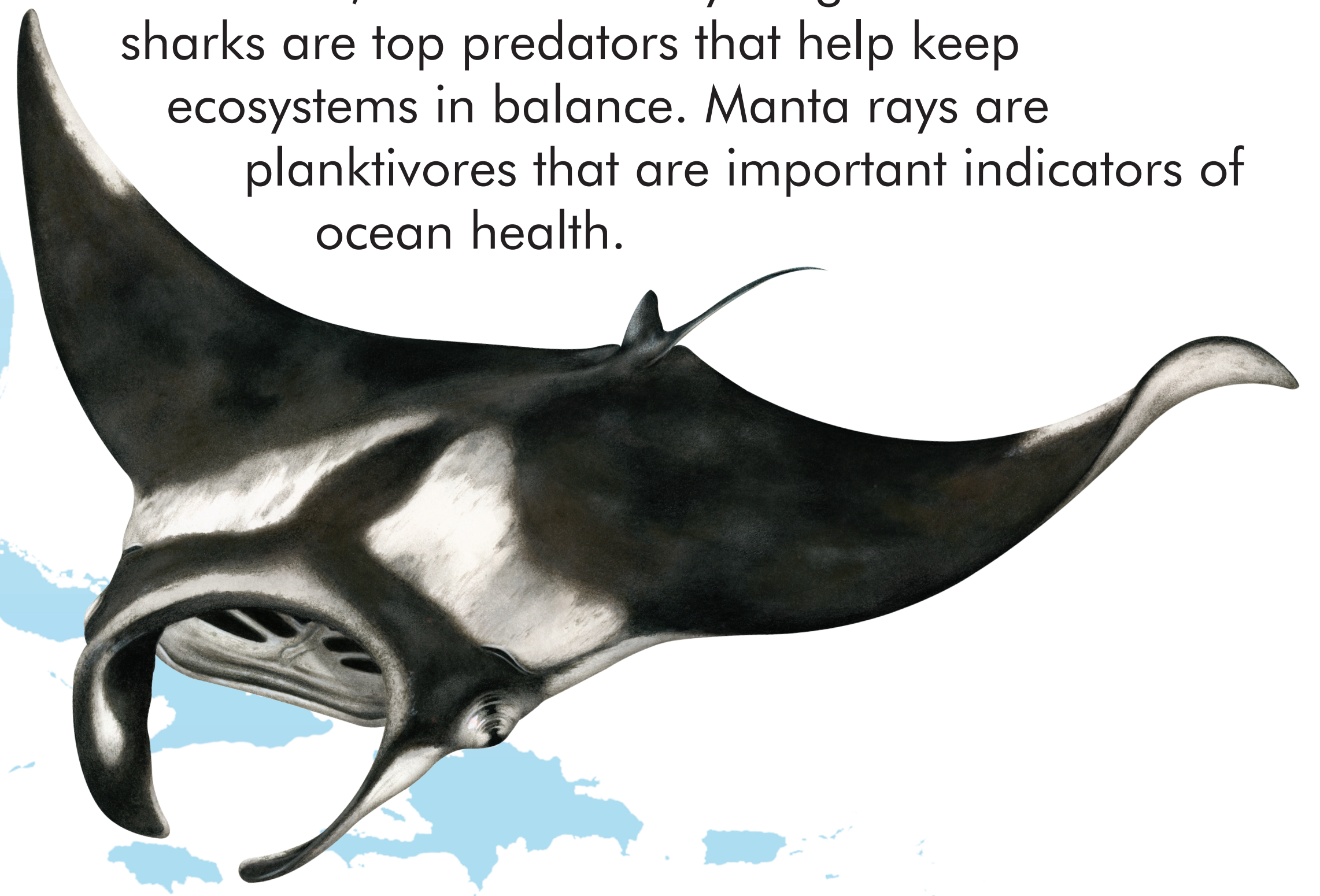


# Protected Sharks and Rays of the Southeast United States

The smalltooth sawfish, giant manta ray, oceanic whitetip shark, and scalloped hammerhead shark are elasmobranchs—cartilaginous fish—protected by the U.S. Endangered Species Act. These species are particularly vulnerable because they grow slow, mature late, and have few young. Sawfish and sharks are top predators that help keep ecosystems in balance. Manta rays are planktivores that are important indicators of ocean health.

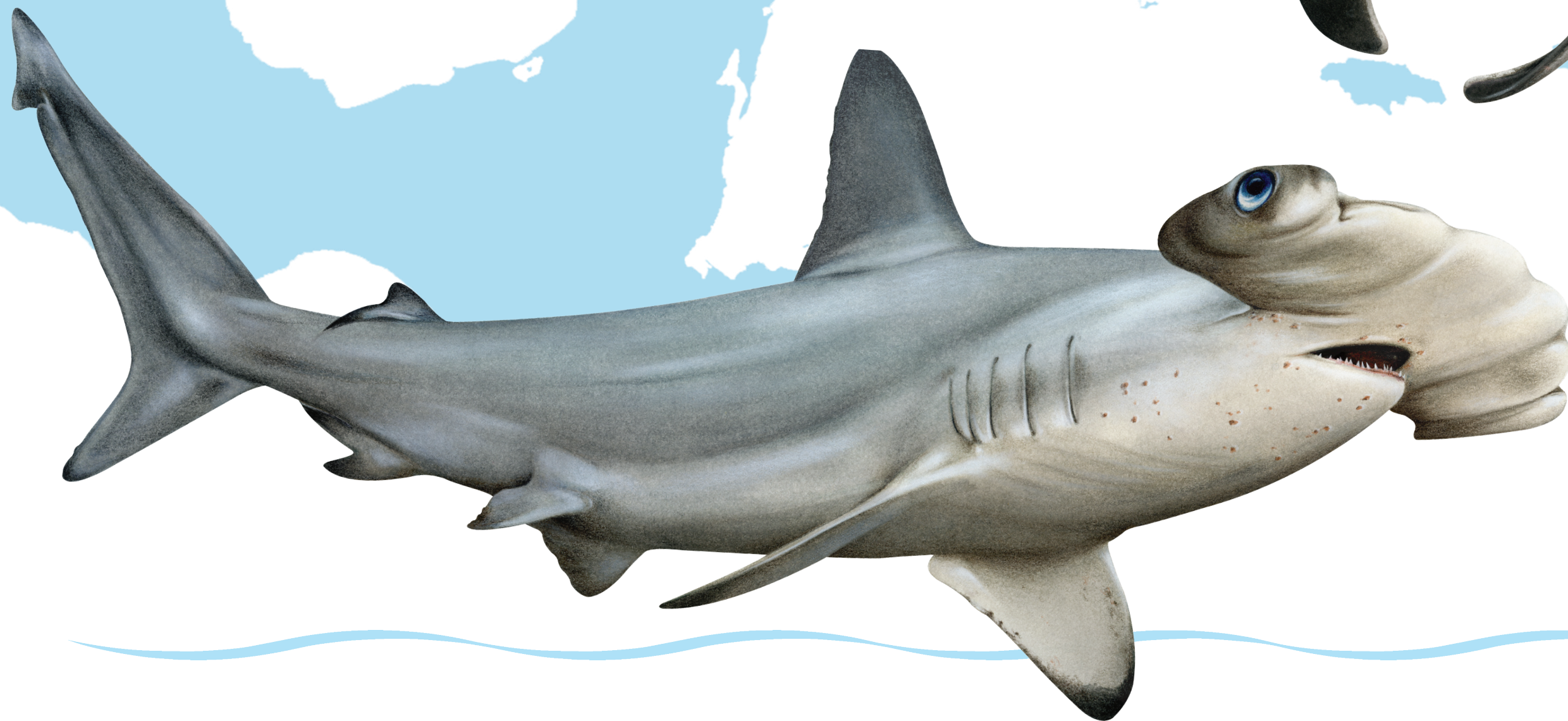
## Giant Manta Ray (*Mobula/Manta birostris*) ▶

**Status:** Threatened  
**Size:** World's largest ray, up to 29 ft wide (8.8 m); at birth 6–8 ft (1.8–2.4 m)  
**Habitat:** Open waters and productive coastal areas  
**Diet:** Zooplankton  
**Fun Fact:** Manta rays have the biggest brains of any fish, with developed areas for learning, individual recognition, and problem solving



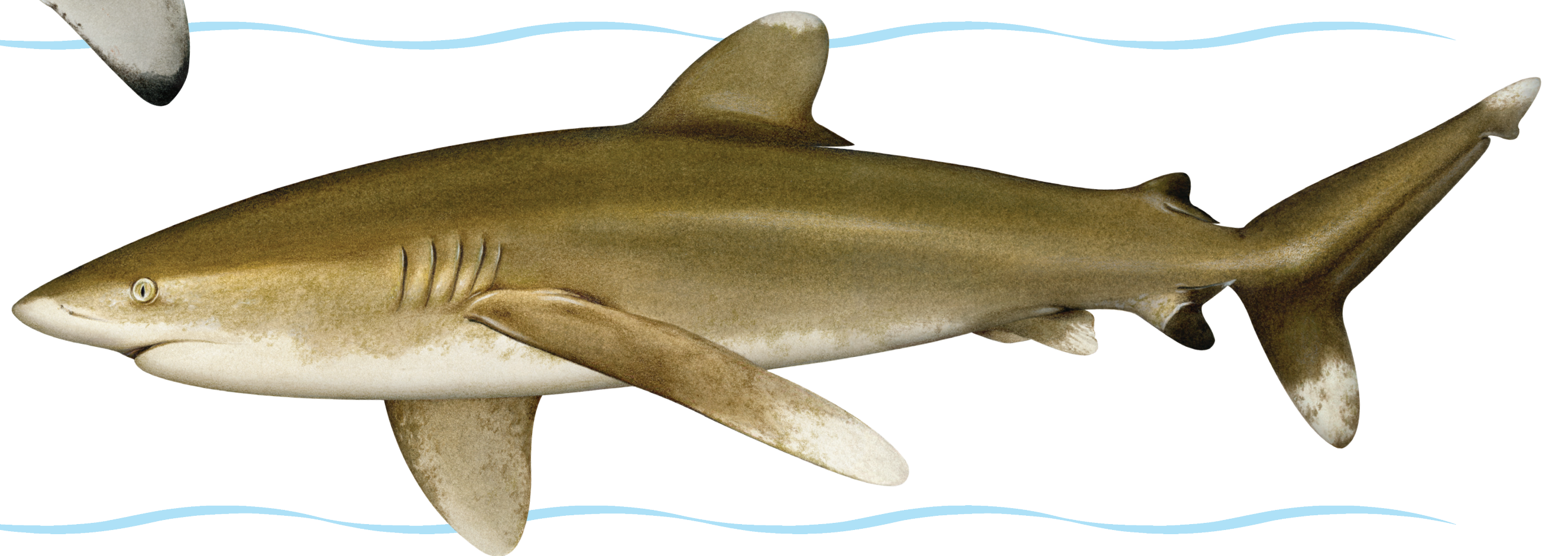
## Scalloped Hammerhead (*Sphyrna lewini*)

**Status:** Threatened (Central and Southwest Atlantic population)  
**Size:** Up to 11 ft (3.3 m)  
**Habitat:** Open ocean and coastal waters  
**Diet:** Fish, cephalopods, crustaceans  
**Fun Fact:** Their hammers contain sensory receptors to help detect prey



## Oceanic Whitetip (*Carcharhinus longimanus*) ▶

**Status:** Threatened  
**Size:** Up to 11.25 ft (3.4 m)  
**Habitat:** Open ocean—strong preference for surface waters  
**Diet:** Cephalopods, fish, sea birds, and marine mammals  
**Fun Fact:** The tips of their fins are rounded which is atypical for sharks



## Smalltooth Sawfish (*Pristis pectinata*)

**Status:** Endangered  
**Size:** Up to 16 ft (4.8 m)  
**Habitat:** Estuaries and coastal waters  
**Diet:** Fish  
**Fun Facts:** Smalltooth sawfish are rays, not sharks. The 22–29 teeth on each side of a sawfish's snout (rostrum) are not true teeth, but rather modified scales that are used to attack prey



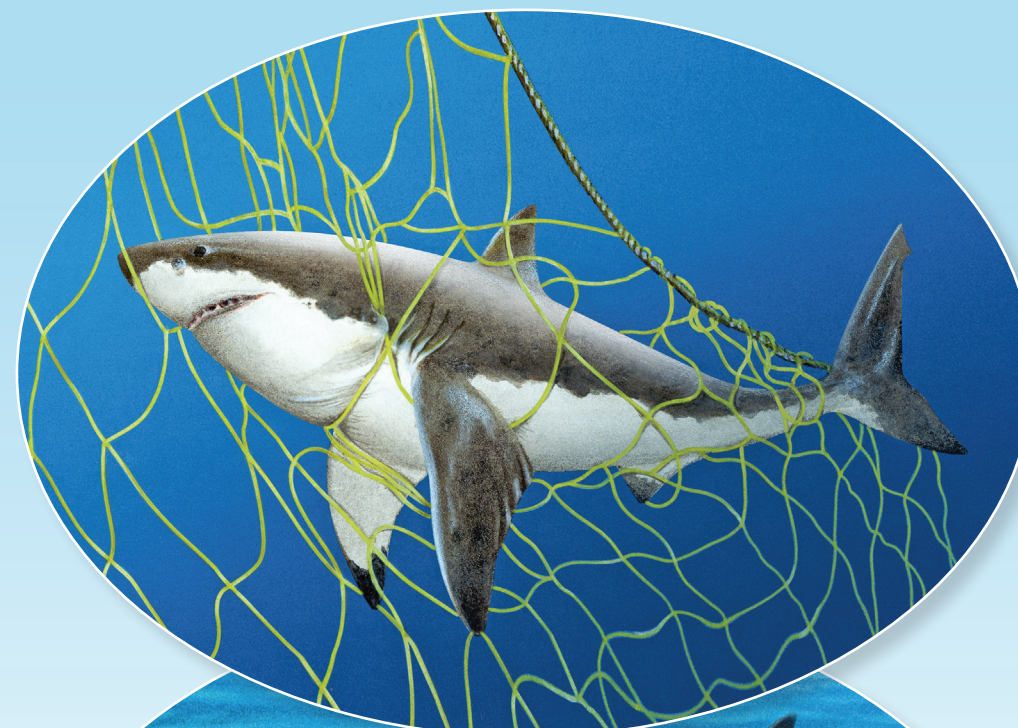
## Threats

**Commercial fishing** is the biggest threat to elasmobranchs due to the high demand for shark and ray products, including fins, meat, oil, and gill rakers.

**Incidental capture (bycatch)** in commercial fisheries kills millions of elasmobranchs every year.

**Ocean pollution** can injure or kill sharks and rays. Trash (e.g., ropes, netting, plastics) can entangle, disfigure, and kill elasmobranchs.

**Habitat loss** associated with coastal development has destroyed and degraded estuarine nursery habitats of sawfish.



## How You Can Help

**Buy sustainable seafood:** The U.S. has some of the most sustainable fisheries in the world. Learn more at [FishWatch.gov](http://FishWatch.gov).

**Reduce Ocean Trash:** Pick up litter and participate in coastal cleanups.

**Respect:** Always view respectfully. Never chase, feed, or touch. It can be harmful and dangerous to them, and you.

**Become a Citizen Scientist:** Report your sighting to NOAA. Learn how at [fisheries.noaa.gov](http://fisheries.noaa.gov)



**NOAA FISHERIES**