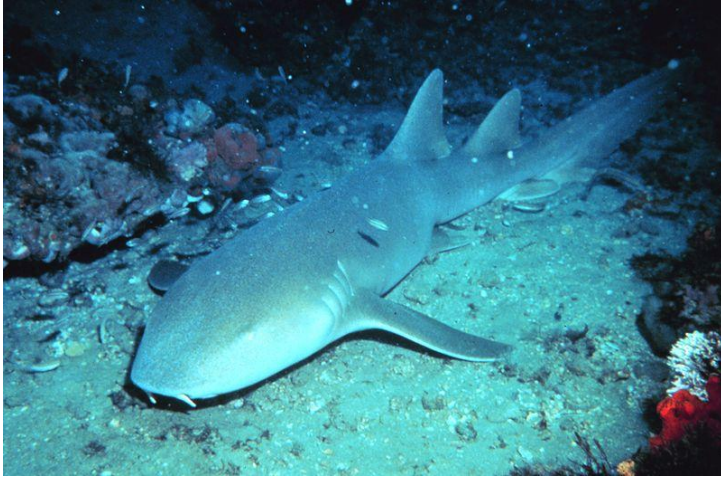


## TREEHOUSE PROJECT

**Common Names:** Nurse Sharks, Sand Shark, Gata, Cacao lixa



**Taxonomic Name:** *Ginglymostoma cirratum*

**Origin of Name:** Greek and Latin

**Meaning:** Curled & Hinged Mouth

**Size Range:** 7 to 14 ft

**Weight:** 90 to 150 kg

**Habitat Range:** Eastern & Western Pacific, and Western Atlantic

**Conservation Status:** IUCN 3.1

### Introduction:

The nurse shark is the only representative of the genus *Ginglymostoma* in the nurse shark family. They can lengthen up to 14 feet and can have a maximum weight of 150 kg. The family name of the nurse shark is *Ginglymostoma* and is derived from Greeks and it is a combination of two words namely hinge and mouth, while the meaning of *cirratum* in literature refers to curl.

### Habitat:

This shark is an inshore bottom dwelling species and is generally associated with tropical to subtropical water. In addition, nurse sharks have been reported to being sighted along continental shelf margins. The usual habitats of these sharks involve coral reefs, islands of mangroves, and sand flats. They are usually found at a water depth of about 12 m on average. They are typically found in the islands of Caribbean and they are widely distributed from Rhode Island down to southern Brazil in the western Atlantic, from Cape Verde to Gabon in the eastern Atlantic, and from Baja California to Peru in the Eastern Pacific (2).

### **Characteristics:**

Nurse sharks are nocturnal creatures that usually spend their time in groups comprising of up to forty members. They are largely solitary in nature, with their usual practice being to search for food at night time, by ruffling through sediments (1).

### **Diet:**

Their diet includes crustaceans, molluscs, tunicates and fish snakes; however, these dietary preferences differ for marine invertebrates, in that they include crabs, shrimps, lobsters, octopuses along with bivalves and snails.

### **Reproduction:**

Their reproduction season is from June to July. The eggs are produced and developed within the body of females in an ovoviviparous fashion, where they are nourished by the yolk sac until they hatch. After a six month gestation period, on average, female sharks produce 21-28 offspring.

### **Conservation Status:**

Nurse sharks have a sluggish demeanour, which makes them ideal targets for fishermen on the prowl. Despite this, they have advantageous aspects to them as well, as their skin produces high quality leather and their liver can be dissected for oil. Sharks are not really in any immediate danger; however, their habitats are localized near human civilization. As a result, this may pose a threat to the survival of these species in the future as human activities may adversely affect their habitats (5).

### **Reference:**

1. Castro, J.I., 2000. The biology of the nurse shark, *Ginglymostoma cirratum*, off the east coast and the Bahama Islands. *Environmental Biology of Fishes* 58, 1–22.
2. Compagno, L.J. V. 1984. FAO species catalog, Volume 4, Part 1.
3. Leonard J. V. Compagno (1984). *Sharks of the World: An annotated and illustrated catalogue of shark species known to date*. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. pp. 205–207, 555–61, 588.
4. Nurse Shark. (n.d.). *National Geographic*. Retrieved February 14, 2009, from <<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/fish/nurse-shark.html>>
5. Pollard, D. A. 1996. The biology and conservation status of the grey nurse shark (*Carcharias taurus* Rafinesque 1810) in New South Wales, Australia. *Aquatic Conservation: Marine and Freshwater Ecosystems*, 6: 1–20.

### **Disclaimer:**

About This Page: This treehouse was created as partial fulfillment for credit in the course ORIGINS 2FF3, Origins and Evolution of Organisms, offered by Jon Stone, Associate Director, the Origins Institute at McMaster University.