

## = Coral catshark =

The coral catshark ( *Atelomycterus marmoratus* ) is a species of catshark , and part of the family Scyliorhinidae . It is common on shallow coral reefs across the Indo @-@ West Pacific , from Pakistan to New Guinea . Reaching up to 70 cm ( 28 in ) in length , the coral catshark has an extremely slender body , a short head and tail , and two dorsal fins that are angled backwards . It can be identified by the numerous black and white spots on its back , sides , and fins , which often merge to form horizontal bars . Furthermore , adult males have distinctively long and thin claspers .

Reclusive and inactive during the day , at dusk and at night the coral catshark actively forages for small , bottom @-@ living invertebrates and bony fishes . Its slender form allows it to access tight spaces on the reef . It is oviparous : females lay purse @-@ shaped egg capsules two at a time on the bottom , and the young hatch after 4 ? 6 months . This small , harmless shark adapts well to captivity and has reproduced in the aquarium ; it is regarded as one of the most suitable shark species for private aquarists . The coral catshark is a minor bycatch of reef fisheries , with minimal commercial value . There is increasing fishing activity and extensive habitat degradation within its range , leading to concern over its population and its assessment as Near Threatened by the International Union for Conservation of Nature ( IUCN ) .

## = = Taxonomy = =

The coral catshark was first described by an anonymous author , usually referred to English zoologist Edward Turner Bennett , in the 1830 Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles . Its original name was *Scyllium marmoratum* , from the Latin *marmoratus* meaning " marbled " . Hence , another common name for this species is marbled catshark . In 1913 , Samuel Garman placed it in his newly created genus *Atelomycterus* . The type specimen was caught off Sumatra and is suspected to have been lost .

## = = Description = =

The coral catshark has a very slender , cylindrical , firm body and a short , narrow head . The snout is short and slightly flattened , with a blunt tip . The eyes are horizontally oval and protected by rudimentary nictitating membranes ; behind are spiracles of moderate size . The large nostrils are mostly covered by broad , triangular flaps of skin on their anterior margins , leaving small incurrent and excurrent openings . The nasal flaps reach the mouth , obscuring a pair of broad grooves connecting the excurrent openings and the mouth . The long , angular mouth has very long furrows at the corners extending onto both the upper and lower jaws . The small teeth have a narrow central cusp flanked by 1 ? 2 cusplets on both sides . There are five pairs of gill slits .

The pectoral fins are fairly large . The first dorsal fin is angled backwards and originates over the rear of the pelvic fin bases ; the second dorsal fin is similarly shaped and slightly smaller than the first , and originates over the front quarter of the anal fin base . Adult males have thin , tapering claspers that extend about two @-@ thirds of the distance between the pelvic and anal fins . The anal fin is much smaller than the dorsal fins . The caudal fin is relatively short and broad , with an indistinct lower lobe and a ventral notch near the tip of the upper lobe . The skin is thick and covered by well @-@ calcified dermal denticles . Extremely variable in coloration , the coral catshark lacks prominent saddle markings but rather has many black and white spots on a grayish background . These spots often run together to form horizontal dashes , which include white tips on the dorsal fins and a white stripe through the gill slits . The underside is plain white . This species grows up to 70 cm ( 28 in ) long .

## = = Distribution and habitat = =

The most widely distributed member of its genus , the coral catshark can be found from Pakistan and India to Southeast Asia and Taiwan , including the Philippines and New Guinea . Its range

extends as far north as the Ryukyu Islands . Early records from Australian waters are in fact of the related Australian marbled catshark ( *A. macleayi* ) and banded sand catshark ( *A. fasciatus* ) . Common and bottom dwelling in nature , the coral catshark inhabits inshore coral reefs at depths not exceeding 15 m ( 49 ft ) .

#### = = Biology and ecology = =

The elongated body of the coral catshark allows it to move into and through small spaces in the reef environment , though it does not " crawl " using its pectoral and pelvic fins like the epaulette shark ( *Hemiscyllium ocellatum* ) . It is primarily crepuscular and nocturnal , with active foraging activity beginning in the afternoon and ending before sunrise . During the day , it generally hides under shelter such as reef overhangs or sunken logs , either singly or in groups . Individual sharks may return to the same hiding place on successive days . This species feeds on small benthic invertebrates and bony fishes ; captive specimens have been observed lying still and lunging at prey that come into range .

The coral catshark is oviparous , with the female producing eggs two at a time . Each egg is enclosed in a purse @-@ shaped capsule roughly 6 ? 8 cm ( 2 @.@ 4 ? 3 @.@ 1 in ) long and 2 cm ( 0 @.@ 79 in ) wide , with two constricted " waists " ; one end of the capsule is squared off while the other bears two short " horns " that may terminate in short tendrils . The female deposits the eggs on the bottom , rather than attaching them to vertical structures . The capsule is light brown when freshly laid and darkens over time . The eggs hatch in 4 ? 6 months at 26 ° C ( 79 ° F ) . Newly hatched sharks measure 10 ? 13 cm ( 3 @.@ 9 ? 5 @.@ 1 in ) long and have a contrasting dorsal pattern of light and dark vertical bars , sometimes with black and white dots . At three months old , the young have grown by 4 ? 5 cm ( 1 @.@ 6 ? 2 @.@ 0 in ) and their coloration has faded to match that of the adults . Males and females attain sexual maturity at around 47 ? 62 cm ( 19 ? 24 in ) and 49 ? 57 cm ( 19 ? 22 in ) respectively .

#### = = Human interactions = =

Common in the aquarium trade , the coral catshark is regarded as well @-@ suited to home aquariums because of its small size , hardiness , and attractive appearance . It requires a tank at least 2 metres long , with sufficiently deep hiding places . This shark tends to be more aggressive than other small sharks , often attacking tankmates larger than it can consume . Captive individuals have been known to live up to 20 years , and the species has reproduced in the aquarium . Small numbers of coral catsharks are caught incidentally by artisanal reef fishers in eastern Indonesia and likely elsewhere ; it may be sold for meat or processed for fishmeal and liver oil , but its size limits its economic importance . The International Union for Conservation of Nature ( IUCN ) has assessed this species as Near Threatened , and notes that with more data it may meet the criteria for Vulnerable . It is likely threatened by the rising fishing pressure throughout its range , as well as by widespread habitat degradation from blast fishing , pollution , and the mining of coral for use as building material .