

= Sicklefin weasel shark =

The sicklefin weasel shark (*Hemigaleus microstoma*) is an uncommon species of ground shark in the family Hemigaleidae . It is native to southern India , southern China , and parts of Southeast Asia , living in shallow waters down to a depth of 170 m (560 ft) . This lightly built shark is characterized by its very short mouth , broad upper teeth with serrations only on the trailing edge , and strongly sickle @-@ shaped fins with obvious white tips on the two dorsal fins . It is light grey or bronze in colour , often with small white blotches on its sides , and reaches a maximum known length of 1 @. @ 1 m (3 @. @ 6 ft) .

Spending most of its time close to the sea floor , the sicklefin weasel shark is a specialist predator of cephalopods . Its reproductive mode is viviparous , in which the unborn young form a placental connection to their mother . Females probably give birth twice a year , with each litter consisting of two to four pups . The sicklefin weasel shark is widely caught by artisanal fisheries and used for meat , fins , and fishmeal ; its low natural abundance and reproductive rate mean that it cannot sustain much fishing pressure . Given that fishing activity is intense throughout its range , the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has assessed this species as Vulnerable .

= = Taxonomy = =

Dutch ichthyologist Pieter Bleeker described the sicklefin weasel shark in 1852 . He gave it the specific epithet *microstoma* , from the Greek *mikros* (" small ") and *stoma* (" mouth ") , and placed it in a new genus , *Hemigaleus* . His account was based on two females from Jakarta , Indonesia , measuring 63 and 70 cm (25 and 28 in) long . This species was once thought to occur off Australia , but that population is now recognised as a distinct species , *H. australiensis* . Yuanting Chu 's 1960 description of *Negogaleus brachygnathus* from Chinese waters is probably of the same species as *H. microstoma* . Albert William Herre 's 1929 description of *Hemigaleus machlani* from the Philippines , though lacking in detail , is also consistent with being of this species .

= = Description = =

The sicklefin weasel shark is a slender @-@ bodied species reaching 1 @. @ 1 m (3 @. @ 6 ft) in length . The snout is fairly long and rounded , with the nostrils preceded by short flaps of skin . The large , oval eyes are equipped with nictitating membranes and are followed by minute spiracles . The mouth forms a very short , wide arch and conceals the teeth when closed . Moderately long furrows are present at the corners of the mouth . There are 25 ? 34 upper and 37 ? 43 lower tooth rows ; the upper teeth are broad and angled with a smooth leading edge and strongly serrated trailing edge , while the lower teeth are narrow , erect , and smooth @-@ edged . The five pairs of gill slits are short .

The fins are strongly falcate (sickle @-@ shaped) , particularly the dorsal fins , pelvic fins , and lower caudal fin lobe . The pectoral fins are narrow and pointed . The first dorsal fin is positioned about halfway between the pectoral and pelvic fins . The second dorsal fin is about two @-@ thirds as tall as the first and is positioned slightly ahead of the anal fin . The anal fin is smaller than the second dorsal fin . The dorsal surface of the caudal peduncle bears a crescent @-@ shaped notch at the caudal fin origin . The asymmetrical caudal fin has a well @-@ developed lower lobe and a long upper lobe with a ventral notch near the tip . The dermal denticles are small and overlapping ; each has five horizontal ridges leading to marginal teeth . This species is light grey or bronze above , often with small white spots on the sides , and pale below . The dorsal fins are tipped in white , which is especially obvious on the second dorsal as the remainder of fin is mostly dark .

= = Distribution and habitat = =

The sicklefin weasel shark is found off southern India and Sri Lanka , as well as from southern China and Taiwan to Java and Borneo . It may also occur in the Philippines and the Red Sea ,

though specimens from these regions need to be compared taxonomically with those from its confirmed range . It does not seem to be very common naturally . This species inhabits continental and insular shelves from inshore waters to at least a depth of 170 m (560 ft) , and usually swims close to the sea floor .

= = Biology and ecology = =

The diet of the sicklefin weasel shark is composed almost entirely of cephalopods , though crustaceans and echinoderms may be infrequently eaten . Its small mouth and short gill slits may be adaptations for capturing cephalopods via suction , while its weak jaws and small teeth reflect a diet of mostly soft @-@ bodied prey . This species is viviparous , wherein the developing embryos are sustained to term through a placental connection formed from the depleted yolk sac . Females likely produce two litters per year , implying a gestation period of under six months . Between two and four pups are born at a time (average 3 @.@ 3) ; newborns measure approximately 45 cm (18 in) long . Males mature sexually at around 74 ? 75 cm (29 ? 30 in) long , while females mature at around 75 ? 78 cm (30 ? 31 in) long .

= = Human interactions = =

The sicklefin weasel shark is not dangerous to humans . It is caught by artisanal fishers throughout its range , mostly in drifting and bottom gillnets but also in bottom trawls and on longlines . The meat is eaten , the fins are used in shark fin soup , and the offal is processed into fishmeal . However , the small size of this shark limits its economic value . The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has assessed the sicklefin weasel shark as Vulnerable , noting that it is naturally uncommon and resides in heavily fished regions . In addition , compared to the related Australian weasel shark it is less productive and thus less resilient to withstand fishing pressure .