

= Tiger catshark =

The tiger catshark (*Halaelurus natalensis*) is a species of catshark , belonging to the family Scyliorhinidae . It is found over sandy areas and near reef peripheries off South Africa and perhaps Mozambique , from close to shore to usually no deeper than 100 m (330 ft) . Reaching a length of 50 cm (20 in) , this small , slim shark has a broad , flattened head with an upturned snout tip . It can additionally be identified by its dorsal colour pattern of ten dark brown saddles on a yellowish brown background .

Bottom @-@ dwelling and inactive , the tiger catshark feeds on a wide variety of fishes and invertebrates from on or near the sea floor . An oviparous species , the female retains her eggs internally until the embryos are at an advanced state of development , resulting in a relatively short hatching time after laying . Between 12 and 22 encapsulated eggs are produced at a time , which the female attaches to the bottom . The tiger catshark is caught incidentally by commercial and recreational fishers but has no economic value . It has been listed as Data Deficient by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) , pending more information .

= = Taxonomy = =

British ichthyologist Charles Tate Regan described the tiger catshark in a 1904 issue of the scientific journal Annals and Magazine of Natural History , based on two specimens presented to the British Museum by J. F. Queckett . He placed the species in the genus *Scyllium* (a synonym of *Scyliorhinus*) and gave it the specific epithet *natalense* , because the type specimens were reportedly collected off the Natal coast of South Africa (though there is suspicion that they were mislabelled and actually came from Algoa Bay) . Later authors reassigned this species to the genus *Halaelurus* . The lined catshark (*Halaelurus lineatus*) was once treated as conspecific to the tiger catshark , until it was described as a separate species in 1975 .

= = Description = =

The body of the tiger catshark is slim and firm , and it grows up to 50 cm (20 in) long . The head is broad and flattened , with a distinct and upturned snout tip . The horizontally oval eyes are situated high on the head and protected by rudimentary nictitating membranes . Beneath each eye is a broad ridge , and behind is a spiracle . The medium @-@ sized nostrils are divided by lobe @-@ like flaps of skin on their anterior rims . The nasal flaps do not reach the large mouth , which forms a wide arch and bears short furrows around the corners . When the mouth is closed , the centre of the lower jaw falls well short of the upper , leaving the upper teeth exposed . The teeth are small and 3 @-@ cusped (rarely 5 @-@ cusped) , with the central cusp the longest . The five pairs of gill slits are placed higher than the level of the mouth and face somewhat upwards .

The pectoral fins are fairly large and rounded . The origin of the first dorsal fin lies over the last third of the pelvic fin bases , while the origin of the much larger second dorsal fin lies over the rear of the anal fin . The claspers of adult males are moderately long and tapering , though those of some individuals may be knob @-@ shaped and spiky . The anal fin is roughly equal in size to the pelvic fins , and smaller but longer @-@ based than the second dorsal fin . The short caudal fin has an indistinct lower lobe and a ventral notch near the tip of the upper lobe . The skin is thick ; the dermal denticles have three @-@ pointed crowns and are widely spaced compared to other species in the genus . Coloured yellowish brown above and cream below , this shark has a characteristic series of ten dorsal saddles from the head to the tail ; each saddle is dark brown with a darker edge and a lighter middle . Unlike in the similar lined catshark , there are no spots or additional markings between the saddles .

= = Distribution and habitat = =

The tiger catshark is endemic to southern Africa , but the limits of its distribution are not well known

. It is known to occur off the Western and Eastern Cape , South Africa , while easterly records from KwaZulu @-@ Natal and Mozambique are uncertain due to confusion with the lined catshark . A common , bottom @-@ dwelling inhabitant of the continental shelf , this shark favours sandy flats and the edges of reefs . It is usually found from the shore to a depth of 100 m (330 ft) ; sharks in the eastern part of its range tend to occur in deeper water than those in the west . There are species records from as deep as 172 m (564 ft) , as well as a single dubious record from 355 m (1 @,@ 165 ft) down on the continental slope . It may segregate by size , with the adults found farther from shore .

= = Biology and ecology = =

The tiger catshark is a sluggish predator of a diverse array of benthic organisms . Its diet is dominated by bony fishes and crustaceans , and also includes cephalopods , polychaete worms , smaller sharks , and scavenged fish offal . It has been observed at the spawning grounds of the chokka squid (*Loligo vulgaris reynaudi*) , feeding on squid that have descended to the bottom to mate and deposit eggs . Documented predators of this species include the broadnose sevengill shark (*Notorynchus cepedianus*) and the ragged tooth shark (*Carcharias taurus*) .

Reproduction in the tiger catshark is oviparous : females produce 6 ? 11 (typically 6 ? 9) eggs in each of their two oviducts at a time . The eggs are contained in tough capsules around 4 cm (1 @.@ 6 in) long and 1 @.@ 5 cm (0 @.@ 59 in) across ; the capsule has thick tendrils at the corners that allow it to be secured to the sea floor . The female retains the eggs internally until the embryos are substantially developed , measuring at least 4 @.@ 3 cm (1 @.@ 7 in) long . Thus , the eggs hatch within only one or two months of being laid , reducing the amount of time that they are exposed to predators . Males and females begin to reach sexual maturity at lengths of 29 ? 35 cm (11 ? 14 in) and 30 ? 44 cm (12 ? 17 in) respectively .

= = Human interactions = =

Harmless to humans , the tiger catshark is caught incidentally by bottom trawlers , recreational anglers , and rarely squid fishers . Though edible , it is not a valued catch and is usually discarded . The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) presently lacks sufficient data to assess its conservation status .