

# BASKING SHARK

The basking shark is the second largest fish in the world and the largest to be found in British coastal waters. The shark can grow up to 10 m in length and weigh as much as 4 tonnes. Its name comes from its habitat of apparently basking on the water surface in good weather. The basking shark is a plankton feeder (plankton are small plantlife found in the sea). It consumes plankton by swimming with its huge mouth open, allowing water to pass through its mouth and out through its gill slits. These gill slits catch the plankton, which the Shark then eats.

Basking sharks take more than 16 years before they can reproduce. They breed in the spring and the female carries an egg that hatches inside her. The length of the pregnancy is unknown but may last between one and 3 years. Basking sharks are thought to live up to 50 years old.

Sharks are hunted for their oil, meat and fins. However, they are vulnerable to extinction by over-fishing because they take a long time to reach sexual maturity and have long pregnancies with lengthy gaps between pregnancies. This means it takes the shark population a long time for their numbers to recover. In areas where basking sharks were regularly hunted such as the coast of Ireland basking shark populations have rapidly declined.