



The Importance of Sharks

Sharks ensure our very survival

The frightening reality is, like them or not, sharks play a crucial role on this planet. Remove sharks from the oceans and we are tampering with our primary food and air sources.

Sharks keep our largest and most important ecosystem healthy. Our existence, in part, is dependent upon theirs. Sharks have sat atop the oceans' food chain, keeping our seas healthy for 450 million years. They are a critical component in an ecosystem that provides 1/3 of our world with food, produces more oxygen than all the rainforests combined, removes half of the atmosphere's manmade carbon dioxide (greenhouse gas), and controls our planet's temperature and weather.

As the apex predators of the oceans, the role of sharks is to keep other marine life in healthy balance and to regulate the oceans. Remove sharks and that balance is seriously upset. Studies are already indicating that regional elimination of sharks can cause disastrous effects including the collapse of fisheries and the death of coral reefs.

A world without sharks?

One study in the U.S. indicates that the elimination of sharks resulted in the destruction of the shellfish industry in waters off the mid-Atlantic states of the United States, due to the unchecked population growth of cow-nose rays, whose mainstay is scallops. Other studies in Belize have shown reef systems falling into extreme decline when the sharks have been over-fished, destroying an entire ecosystem. The knock-on effects are frightening: the spike in grouper population (thanks to the elimination of sharks) resulted in a decimation of the parrotfish population, who could no longer perform their important role: keeping the coral algae-free.

What legacy will we leave for our children?

We don't hear how the elimination of sharks might impact our best natural defense against global warming. Or how our favorite foods might disappear as a side effect of the extinction of sharks. Or that we could lose more oxygen than is produced by all the trees and jungles in the world combined if we lose our sharks. But we should.

No one knows for sure what will happen globally if shark populations are destroyed, but one can safely fear the results. Two hundred and fifty million years ago, this planet suffered the largest mass extinction on record, and scientists believe this was caused in part by catastrophic changes in the ocean. Sharks play a keystone role ensuring our seas remain in a healthy equilibrium and do not reach that point again.



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