

Introduction to the Chondrichthyes

Jaws

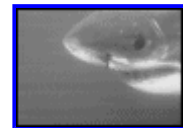


Sharks, skates, rays, and even stranger fish make up the Chondrichthyes, or "cartilaginous fish." First appearing on Earth almost 450 million years ago, cartilaginous fish today include both fearsome predators and harmless mollusc-eaters (harmless, that is, unless you are a mollusc). A number of shark and ray species are fished, commercially or for sport.

Members of the Chondrichthyes all lack [true bone](#) and have a skeleton made of cartilage (the flexible material you can feel in your nose and ears). Only their teeth, and sometimes their vertebrae, are calcified; this calcified cartilage has a different structure from that of true bone. Thus, preservation of the whole body of a cartilaginous fish only takes place under special conditions. This complete fossil rhinobatoid (guitarfish -- one of the earliest rays), *Rhinobatis*, shown on display at the Senckenberg Museum in Frankfurt, Germany, is from the Upper Cretaceous of Haqel, Lebanon, a place that has yielded many complete fossil sharks and rays.

UCMP Special Exhibit: [Great White Shark](#)

Former UCMP graduate student [Doug Long](#) has worked extensively with living great white sharks, as well as with fossil sharks and fish. You can learn about the great white shark from his exhibit.



Click on the buttons below to find out more about the Chondrichthyes.



Drop in to [Fiona's Shark Mania](#) page for tons of information on living sharks of all sorts.

