

Stranding of Whale sharks along north Andhra Pradesh coast



Stranded whale shark at Thantadi, Anapalli district

Rhincodon typus Smith, 1828, commonly known as whale shark, is found in tropical and temperate waters, except the Mediterranean Sea. It is most commonly seen in deeper water

but also in shallow areas near estuaries and river mouths. The whale shark is the largest fish on earth and is an epipelagic, planktivorous fish with late maturation and low number of



A carcass of Whale shark at Donkuru, Srikakulam district

pups. Due to its life history, the species is protected under different national and international legislation. The species is listed in the “Endangered” category in the IUCN RED List and is also included in Appendices I and II of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) and Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). In India, the species has been protected under Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, since May 2001, and currently it is also included in Schedule I of the Indian

Wildlife Protection and Amendment Act, 2022. Though not targeted, Whale sharks are occasionally caught/damaged in coastal fisheries unintentionally. Whale sharks are the most common elasmobranch protected species landed as incidental catch in Andhra Pradesh. Reports of stranding/incidental catch of the species are available from several locations in the state, namely, Kakinada, Visakhapatnam and Srikakulam, with the gillnets being the most common fishing gear in which the animals get entangled. Most recently, on April 13, 2024, a whale shark of total length 9.1 m and weight

2.5 tons (approx.) was entangled in a traditional fishing net, shoreseine (locally known as Dharivala), operated at Thantadi (17.524386 and 83.062544) in Anakapalli district. Fishermen tried to release the animals back to the sea. However, it died and got stranded on the beach. Earlier, a carcass of whale shark of 6 m length and weight 2 tons (approx.) was observed at Donkuru (19.056232 and 84.749548) in the Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh on 27.02.24. As per fishermen's view, the animal got entangled in a gillnet operated at a depth of 35 m, died, and was stranded on the beach. Though it is impossible to totally avoid accidental entanglement of whale sharks in fishing gear, advisories can be made based on seasonal and temporal distribution or presence of these animals, in and near fishing grounds, which can be a guide for fishermen to reduce bycatch of these majestic animals.

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