

BAYLANDS

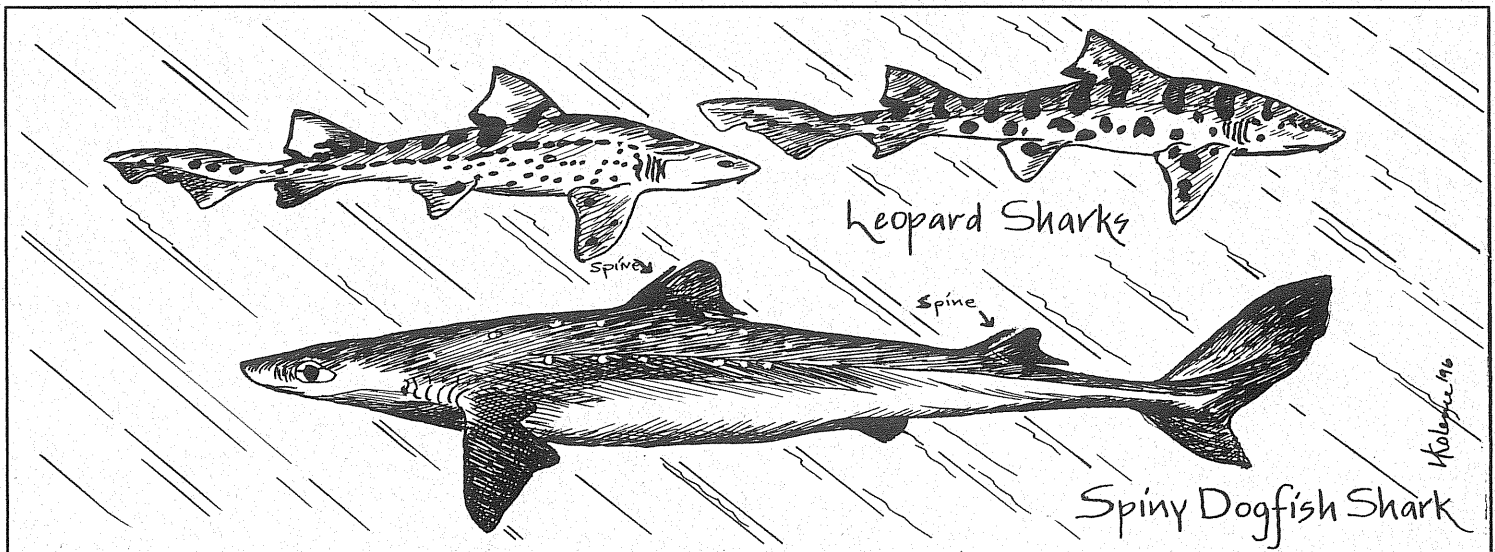
Sharks of the South Bay

Nature Notes

Of all the creatures that live in the great kingdom of the sea, sharks are perhaps the most misunderstood. When one hears the word "shark", the mind quickly conjures up a man-eating Great White. But Great Whites are only one species, and a rare one. There are numerous shark species, ranging from harmless animals under a foot long to the mammoth but easy going Whale Shark. Only a very small percentage of sharks are dangerous to man. In particular, the sharks native to San Francisco Bay have a docile nature if left alone. Three species of shark are common in the waters around the Palo Alto Baylands: the *Leopard Shark*, the *Spiny Dogfish*, and the *Brown Smoothhound*.

LEOPARD SHARKS

Leopard Sharks are found in bays and along beaches from Oregon to Baja California, and are common in the Bay. They tend to stay where the water is less than 12 feet deep, although they have been found at depths down to 300 feet. They are strong-swimming, can reach lengths of up to six and a half feet, have a short, blunt snout, and their gray body is heavily spotted. Like many shark species, they are scavengers but will catch and eat fish and small invertebrates. They are not considered dangerous to humans, and tend to be timid around divers. For this reason, along with their appearance and constant swimming behavior, Leopard Sharks are a major attraction in many aquariums around the world.



SPINY DOGFISH

The Spiny Dogfish is one of the most common sharks of the West Coast, and is found in coastal areas from Alaska to central Baja California. They are voracious predators, feeding often on other fish and invertebrates. The Spiny Dogfish is dark gray with white spots, and can grow to a length of five feet. It is so named because of the spines found on the front of each of their dorsal fins. Each of them has a mildly toxic substance in them, but are only used by the Dogfish in self defense. Except for these spines, they are not dangerous to man.

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Spiny Dogfish often live to be 40 years old. Males are sexually mature at 13, females mature much later at 23 years. They are ovoviviparous, which means their eggs hatch within the female's body and are born shortly thereafter. An average litter contains 20 young.

BROWN SMOOTHHOUNDS

The Brown Smoothhound is the most colorful of the three sharks in our area. Three foot long, this shark is reddish-brown and bronze on top, and silver below. Smoothhounds range from Coos Bay, Oregon to the Gulf of California. They are also found off the coasts of Ecuador and Peru. They prefer to live in shallow water like that near the Palo Alto Baylands.

Smoothhounds have a varied diet. They mainly eat crab and shrimp, but also like small fish, clam worms, and sea squirts. Smoothhounds are viviparous, which means that its eggs hatch and the young develop inside the adult's body. Up to ten babies are born in each litter.

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