

DOLPHIN LOG

Creature Feature

The Bearded Wobbegong

Have you ever heard of a “wobbegong?” This is the name of an unusual shark found only in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of Australia. The aborigines, or first people to live in that region, gave the wobbegong its odd name.

This particular animal, whose scientific name is *Orectolobus maculatus*, belongs to the family of sharks called “carpet sharks,”

probably because they lie on the bottom of the ocean, just as a carpet lies on the floor of a house.


But don't walk on this carpet! The wobbegong is not an aggressive shark, but like most other marine animals, when disturbed or attacked, it may fight back. The wobbegong has many rows of small, sharp teeth with which to defend itself.

Wobbegongs live in shallow water, often in caves or in the hollow spaces found in coral reefs. But whether they are out on the open ocean floor or in a cave, they are so well camouflaged among seaweed and rocks that they appear to be almost invisible.

Their round, flat, brownish-tan bodies are covered with spots and bars. Around the mouth of its wide, flat head are soft skin flaps, called “barbels,” which look like a

fringed beard made of algae. These barbels give the wobbegong a distinctive look and also the very important advantage of blending in with its environment.

Smaller than most sharks, wobbegongs range from about three feet (1 m) to ten feet (3 m) long. They feed at night, preferring to lie about on the ocean floor during the day. Wobbegongs are oviparous fish, which means they give birth by laying eggs from which the babies hatch.

The wobbegong's funny face and specially-colored body are good examples of how an animal adapts to its environment for purposes of feeding, hiding and just taking time out for a good mid-day nap. 

By Nancy Seymour-Marullo

