



HALU'U (gray reef shark) *Carcharhinus amblyrhynchos*

Sharks or halu'u (a general term used by Chamorros for all sharks), differ from other fishes in many ways. Their skin is covered with tiny dermal denticles similar to teeth. This gives the skin a rough, sandpaper-like texture. The teeth continuously form in rows on the inner surface of the jaws. When an outer tooth is lost, the next available inner tooth takes its place.

The fins of the halu'u have the same skin and texture as the rest of the body and are rigid at their bases so they cannot be folded as in most other fishes. Using a system of pores around its head and sides, and a pair of inner ears, the halu'u can feel vibrations and sounds made by fish and other animals that are far away. At close distance, the halu'u, with its sharp sense of smell, can find the smallest concentration of blood or other body fluids from potential prey. Sight is limited by the clarity of the water. At close range, halu'u have an amazing ability to sense the tiny electrical fields given off by all living creatures. This allows them to find their prey in complete darkness or hidden beneath the sand. Some halu'u use magnetic fields which allow them to determine in which direction they are swimming.

There are more than 12 species of halu'u in Guam's waters. Most are harmless unless stimulated or provoked. Besides the gray reef shark, the reef whitetip shark (*Triaenodon obesus*) and the reef blacktip shark (*Carcharhinus melanopterus*) are the most common sharks on shallow reefs. They are small, reaching a length of about six feet (1.8 m). The gray reef shark can be quite aggressive and territorial, and has been known to cause severe, although, non-fatal bites. The other two species generally flee when approached.

The tiger shark (*Galeocerdo cuvieri*) is our most dangerous species. It grows to about 18 feet (5.5 m), will eat almost anything, and has been known to attack and eat divers. Fortunately, it spends most of its daylight hours in water more than 200 feet (60 m) deep where encounters with humans are unlikely, but it occasionally enters shallow water at night or anytime when attracted by dead animals or garbage, or when breeding.

Halu'u are at the top of the coral reef food chain and play an important role in the balance of nature. They should not be killed indiscriminately unless for safety or some good use. Halu'u do not produce many young and grow rather slowly. It is easy to overfish halu'u and, although people fear them, they are an important part of a healthy ecosystem. They eat diseased or sick animals as well as dead or dying animals.