

Feral February Episode 17 – Basking in second place

Description

Throughout the month of February, which I am calling “Feral February,” I am going to do something a little bit different – I’m going to create a series of theme posts every week day about my favourite things in the world: Animals.

Today’s animal is the basking shark.

There are normal-sized fish, then there are “big” fish, like the whale shark, which can grow over 40 feet (or 12 metres) long! While the whale shark is the undisputed big fish in the sea, being the second largest living fish is nothing to sneeze at – and that honour belongs to the basking shark, which clocks in at around 33 feet (or 10 metres) and can weigh over 8,000 pounds.



Basking shark .Photo courtesy of Greg Skomal / NOAA Fisheries Service. [Source](#).

The basking shark, like the whale shark, eats plankton as it slowly travels the world's oceans, opening its mouth to filter them out of the water. It is easily identified due to its massive size, conical snout and gills that are so large they extend around the top and bottom of its head. As water moves through the enlarged gill slits, gill rakers (bristle-like structures) trap the plankton for the shark to swallow in huge amounts.

The basking shark is completely harmless to people and often feeds near the surface of the water, seemingly basking in the sun as it does so, even lazily rolling upside down in the water, which gave rise to its name.

Daily dose of trivia:

Unlike the whale shark, the basking shark does not actively draw in water using suction to filter out plankton. Instead, and at the incredible fast speed of approximately three miles per hour, the basking shark simply opens its mouth and swims, letting its prey come to it. At this speed, the average basking shark filters 2,000 tonnes of water per hour through its mouth and gills.

*****It is sad to report that this will be my last Feral February post, as I am heading to North Carolina for the Science Online conference tomorrow, but I want to thank everyone for reading, sharing and enjoying them. And please, if you liked them, please let me know and perhaps I'll do it again. March is just around the corner, and Mammal March does have a nice ring to it.*****

Category

1. Feral February

Tags

1. animals
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