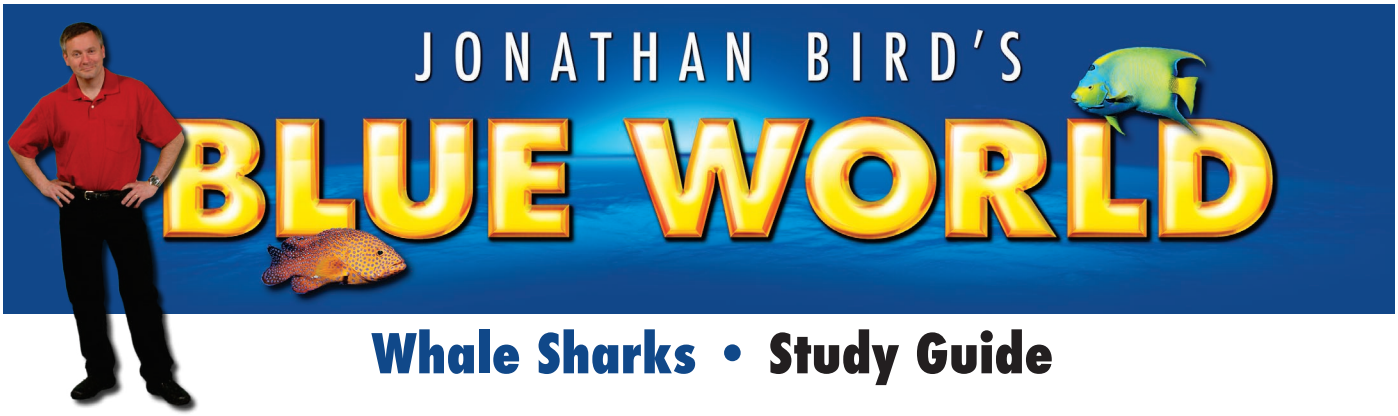

Whale Sharks • Study Guide

Jonathan visits the remote island of Holbox in Mexico to learn about seasonal aggregations of the world's largest fish--the whale shark. Although this shark is huge--bigger than a school bus--it's completely harmless, eating only plankton. Why do hundreds of these enormous animals gather every year in the southern Gulf of Mexico? Jonathan wants to find out.

Objectives

1. Introduces viewers to the world's largest fish--a shark the size of a whale.
2. Illustrates how plankton are incredibly important to even the largest animals in the ocean.
3. Illustrates how tourism can create opportunities for conservation.

Questions for before watching the program

1. What makes a fish a fish? Are sharks fish? Are whales fish? What do you think a *Whale shark* is?
2. What is filter feeding? What are some animals known for filter feeding? Do sharks filter feed? How do most sharks feed?
3. What is plankton? Why is plankton important?

Discussion for after watching the program

1. Why do you think whale sharks have spots?
2. Why are Whale sharks so big, while most sharks are nowhere near that large? Is there an advantage to being large? (Hint: does food availability play a role?)
3. How has Whale shark watching helped the marine environment around Holbox?
4. Why do you think there is so much plankton around Holbox in the summer? (Do a little research on "plankton blooms.")
5. Why might plankton gather near the surface?
6. Internet research: How large do Whale sharks get? How much can they weigh? To put that in perspective, if a car weighs 3000 pounds, how many cars would it take to weigh as much as a fully-grown Whale shark?