

# Sharks can acquire a taste for jazz music

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Credit: Macquarie University

While for many people sharks bring to mind the Jaws theme music, it seems sharks themselves prefer jazz.

Far from mindless eating machines, new research from the Macquarie University Fish Lab has shown sharks are much more sophisticated than most people imagine.

Researchers trained baby Port Jackson sharks to associate music with a [food](#) reward. When played a jazz song, the sharks learnt to go to a feeding station for a tasty treat.

"Sound is really important for aquatic animals, it travels well under water and [fish](#) use it to find food, hiding places and even to communicate," said lead author Catarina Vila-Pouca from the Department of Biological Sciences.

Anecdotal reports have suggested that sharks can learn to associate the sounds of boat engines with food, for example as part of shark cage-diving activities. The study published this week in *Animal Cognition* provides evidence that sharks can learn the association relatively quickly.

Associate Professor Culum Brown of the Department of Biological Sciences and the leader of The Fish Lab said when it came to differentiating between jazz and [classical music](#), the sharks struggled.

"It was obvious that the sharks knew that they had to do something when the classical music was played, but they couldn't figure out that they had to go to a different location," said Associate Professor Brown.

"The task is harder than it sounds, because the sharks had to learn that different locations were associated with a particular genre of [music](#), which was then paired with a [food reward](#). Perhaps with more training they would have figured it out."

Ms Vila-Pouca said the research from The Fish Lab hopes to reveal some of the fascinating learning abilities of sharks.

"Sharks are generally underestimated when it comes to learning abilities – most people see them as mindless, instinctive animals.

"However, they have really big brains and are obviously much smarter than we give them credit for.

"Gaining a better understanding of this will help grow positive public

opinion of [sharks](#) and may shift public and political will towards their conservation."

**More information:** Catarina Vila Pouca et al. Food approach conditioning and discrimination learning using sound cues in benthic sharks, *Animal Cognition* (2018). [DOI: 10.1007/s10071-018-1183-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10071-018-1183-1)

Provided by Macquarie University

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