

Underwater footage reveals sharks' flexible feeding skills

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Two meter nurse shark exploring the reefs around the Hol Chan marine reserve, Caye Caulker, Belize. Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Underwater cameras have revealed the impressive range of skills nurse sharks use when feeding.

The new study, by the University of Exeter and NGO Beneath the Waves, used baited remote underwater video (BRUV) cameras off the Turks and Caicos Islands.

The researchers identified a range of different feeding behaviors used by the [sharks](#).

These included vertical feeding (head down), ventral feeding (belly up) and "pectoral positioning"—sharks flexing their pectoral fins in a motion similar to "walking" on the sea floor.

"These feeding behaviors show that nurse sharks are adapted to feed on different prey across a variety of habitats," said lead author Kristian Parton, of the Center for Ecology and Conservation on Exeter's Penryn Campus in Cornwall.

While most shark species have little movement in their [pectoral fins](#), nurse sharks are related to epaulet sharks, which can "walk" on dry land using these fins.

"Our footage suggests nurse sharks may do something similar on the sea floor," Parton said.

"This work illustrates the immense behavioral adaptability of coastal [shark species](#)," noted Dr. Oliver Shipley, Senior Research Scientist at Beneath The Waves.

"Despite their widespread nature, we know comparatively little about nurse shark behavior relative to other coastal species, so this study provides an important step to further understanding their ecological role."

Previous research on nurse sharks has mostly focused on their

reproductive behavior. However, this new research helps shine a light on the important role nurse sharks play on tropical reefs around the world.

The paper is published in the journal *Environmental Biology of Fishes*.

More information: Kristian J. Parton et al, Opportunistic camera surveys provide insight into discrete foraging behaviours in nurse sharks (*Ginglymostoma cirratum*), *Environmental Biology of Fishes* (2022).

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