

# 'Atypical' gathering of 'rare' deep-sea predators spotted for first time in Panama

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(a) Prickly shark no. 11 measured with laser and (b) an identified male with claspers. Credit: *Journal of Fish Biology* (2024). DOI: 10.1111/jfb.15720

Deep underwater, a group of elusive predators gathered off the coast of Panama. The gathering was "atypical" and a first of its kind for the area.

It didn't go unnoticed.

Scientists in a [submarine](#) spotted the "rare" sea creatures and identified them as prickly [sharks](#), according to a [study](#) published March 8 in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Fish Biology*.

Prickly sharks, scientifically known as *Echinorhinus cookei*, are an elusive and "solitary" deep-sea species named for the "small" thorny

projections that cover their bodies, researchers said. These sharks are found throughout the Pacific Ocean. A photo shows the pale gray-brown shark.

Researchers spotted 12 prickly sharks in May 2022 during a series of submarine dives to explore the Cordillera de Coiba seamounts, a protected marine area off the western coast of Panama, the study said.

Two prickly sharks were seen on their own, and 10 were seen in an "atypical" gathering, researchers said. The sharks seemed to have "gathered deliberately rather than coincidentally," but researchers did not know why.

The deep-sea predators "were mainly observed swimming over rocky habitats" about 1,000 feet underwater, the study said.

The sighting was the "first documented record of live specimens of *Echinorhinus cookei* in Panama," researchers said. Prickly sharks had been seen in the area before, but the sightings were not confirmed.

The recent sightings suggest that the Cordillera de Coiba seamounts might be a "[critical habitat](#)" for prickly sharks, the study said.

The research team included Hector Guzman, Candy Real and Stefanie Kaiser.

**More information:** Hector M. Guzman et al, First evidence of prickly shark, *Echinorhinus cookei* Pietschmann 1928, aggregation on seamounts in the eastern Pacific, Panama, *Journal of Fish Biology* (2024). [DOI: 10.1111/jfb.15720](https://doi.org/10.1111/jfb.15720)

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