**With Whale Sharks, Males Grow Faster, But Females Grow Bigger**

**鲸鲨：雄性生长较快，雌性则长得更大**

New research has provided surprising details about the biology of Earth’s largest fish, the whale shark. Scientists say that female whale sharks grow more slowly but reach a much larger size than males.

一项新的研究发现了地球上最大的鱼类——鲸鲨令人惊讶的生物学知识。科学家们表示，雌性鲸鲨生长速度较慢，但长得比雄性鲸鲨要大得多。

Researchers recently said they had followed the growth of 54 whale sharks over 10 years. The creatures swam in the Ningaloo Reef off of Australia’s west coast, where hundreds of the rare fish travel every year.

近期研究人员表示，他们追踪了54条鲸鲨10年内的生长情况。这些鲸鲨在澳大利亚西海岸的宁加罗礁游弋。宁加罗礁每年都会有数百条这种稀有鱼类游弋。

Whale sharks of both sexes were found to have their fastest growth while young — about 20 to 30 centimeters per year.

研究发现鲸鲨无论雌雄都是在幼时生长最快——每年大约长20至30厘米。

Males were found to grow faster than females. They reached around eight meters in length at about 30 years old. At that age, they reach sexual maturity, meaning the fish were able to produce young. Females grew larger than males. Females reached about 14 meters at about age 50, when they reached sexual maturity.

研究还发现雄性的生长速度比雌性快。雄性鲸鲨30岁左右能长8米左右。这个年龄段它们已经性成熟，而这意味着它们能够孕育下一代。雌性比雄性长得大。雌性在50岁左右长到14米左右，这时它们也达到性成熟。

Mark Meekan is a marine biologist at the Australian Institute of Marine Science. He led the research that was published in Frontiers in Marine Science.

澳大利亚海洋科学研究所的海洋生物学家马克·米肯领导了这项研究。该研究发表于《海洋科学前沿》。

Meekan described whale sharks as “remarkable.” He noted that females give birth to many young: “up to 300 at one time.” For this reason, Meekan said, female sharks probably need to be very large.

米肯称鲸鲨很“了不起”。他指出，雌性鲸鲨能够生育非常多的下一代：“一次最多300只。”米肯表示，或许正因如此雌性鲸鲨才需要长得非常大。

“Our study provides the first evidence that male and female whale sharks grow at different rates,” Meekan said.

米肯说：“我们的研究为表明雄性和雌性鲸鲨的生长速度不同提供了第一个证据。”

Whale sharks are filter feeders, meaning they take food and nutrients from the water. They swim great distances to find enough to eat.

鲸鲨是滤食动物，这意味着它们从水中摄取食物和营养。他们会游走很远的路，以找到足够的食物。

The longest-known whale shark ever recorded reached a length of about 18 meters. Whale sharks can live for 100 to 150 years.

有史以来已知最长的鲸鲨长约18米。鲸鲨可以活100到150年。

Meekan suggested the study’s findings were important for saving whale sharks. He noted that if it takes 30 or more years for the creatures to reach sexual maturity, “there are lots of threats such as hunting and ship-strike...before they get a chance to breed.”

米肯认为这项研究的发现对于拯救鲸鲨很重要。他指出，如果这些生物要30年或更长的时间才能达到性成熟，那“在它们拥有繁殖能力前会面临许多威胁，比如狩猎和船舶撞击……”

For that reason, Meekan described efforts to save the creatures as “urgent.”

因此，米肯称拯救这些生物的任务很“紧急”。

I’m John Russell.

约翰·罗素报道。

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