

Raja Ampat's Walking Sharks: The Epaulette Shark



Raja Ampat's epaulette shark is nature's true wonder. These tiny creatures, the world's smallest shark species, have developed the ability to "walk" on land - an ingenious capability that earned it the nickname "the walking shark", and more importantly, ensuring its survival to escape suffocation and death.

At less than [1 metre long](#), the epaulette shark lives in the shallow waters among coral reefs, mangrove roots and seabeds where it feeds on bottom-dwelling invertebrates and hides from predators. If stranded on dry land due to receding tides, it can use its fins to "walk" or crawl for [up to 30 metres](#) back to larger pools of water, using its tiny body to cleverly maneuver its way out of a hostile environment and back to safety.

Where Do Epaulette Sharks Live

Epaulette sharks can be found in the shallow waters amongst the [coral reefs](#) and rocky outcrops off Australia, Indonesia and New Guinea at depths of 0-10 metres. Here in Raja Ampat, the epaulette shark is a protected species under Indonesian law, and is often referred to as Kalabia, Mandemor, or *hiu berjalan* in Indonesian, which translates to *walking shark*.

A survey conducted by the [Save Our Seas foundation](#) states that epaulette sharks can be found amongst Raja Ampat's seagrass meadows, corals, rocky outcrops, reef rubble patches, sandy fringes, and amongst the mangrove roots in Arborek and Yenbuba. The locals have observed that the epaulette sharks come very close to shore, most likely due to the abundance of clams and other food sources that are readily found there.

Epaulette Shark Walking

Why have epaulette sharks evolved to be able to “walk”? Scientists and marine experts have concluded that epaulette sharks walking is a survival instinct which has served it well. Some [experts](#) have even described the epaulette shark walking as “breaking all rules of survival”.

Why Do Epaulette Sharks Walk?

The epaulette shark’s habitats along the coastlines are often shallow pools of water that would rise and recede according to the tides. Once the tide changes, the epaulette shark could become trapped in a small pool of water. It would face oxygen deficiency and exposure to the burning sun. To escape death, the epaulette shark “walks” using its [paddle-shaped pectoral and pelvic fins](#) as legs and feet to crawl its way back to safety.

More Amazing Epaulette Shark Facts

They Can Go Without Oxygen

Epaulette sharks aren’t just able to walk on land to get to safety – this amazing carpet shark species can survive oxygen deficiency for up to [three hours](#) without any detrimental side effects by slowing down its metabolism.

They Can Control Slow Their Heart Rate

Epaulette sharks can slow their heart rate and breathing, increase blood supply to their brain and [shut down](#) non-essential brain functions – ensuring survival without oxygen for long periods of time.

No Fear Of Humans

Epaulette sharks are often spotted in the shallow waters along the coastlines here in Raja Ampat. They’re harmless to humans but would swim or “walk” away if feeling threatened. If you do come across an epaulette shark here in Raja Ampat, please refrain from touching them to avoid injury to both the shark and yourself – the epaulette shark teeth can be sharp, and they may bite when handled closely.

They Are Tiny But Feisty

Epaulette sharks are small, growing to less than 1 metre in length, with a slim body, a short head and broad paired fins. Most are sandy-brown in colour with a pattern of dark spots. The name “epaulette” comes from a large, [white-ringed black spot](#) behind each pectoral fin, which are reminiscent of military epaulettes.

They’re Related To The Wobbegong Shark

Epaulette sharks belong to a group of sharks known as Carpet Sharks, which includes the wobbegong sharks. Both feature beautiful markings on their bodies and are experts at camouflage, which answers the often asked question of why do epaulette sharks have a black spot.

Epaulette Shark Teeth

The epaulette shark feeds on crustaceans, worms, and small bony fish. It has been noted that the epaulette shark can depress its teeth to form a flat surface for [crushing](#) hard-shelled prey.

Where Can You See Epaulette Sharks?

You can easily spot epaulette sharks in many places throughout Raja Ampat, whether along the coastlines or on the ocean floor. There have been sightings of epaulette sharks near jetties or shallow docks but these are not guaranteed. Another option is to join Diving Resort's [night dives](#) and let our expert dive masters take you to see these nocturnal creatures in their natural environment when the tides are low.

Raja Ampat Diving With Diving Resorts

Explore Raja Ampat's stunning marine and coral reefs biodiversity with Diving Resorts. As the pioneers of diving in Raja Ampat having discovered most of the famous dive sites in the area, we have become the Raja Ampat dive center of choice for diving enthusiasts and documentary groups.

Our unique location along the Dampier Strait makes us a favourite with divers. Our two private dive resorts – Bay Resort and Eco Resort – both come with their own dedicated dive centers offering PADI Dive Courses and fully serviced, high quality rental equipment. Dives and courses are led by experienced PADI professionals with many years of experience.

There are hundreds of dive sites in Raja Ampat not too far away from Eco Resort and Bay Resort, each with its own unique sights and appeal including Cape Kri, Manta Sandy, Melissa's Garden, Blue Magic, Sardines and so much more.

Bay Resort

Perfect for those who want a touch of luxury, Sarido Bay Resort is a collection of 6 charming bungalows with spacious rooms and ensuites, each with AC or fan and a veranda that overlooks a vibrant house reef.

Eco Resort

Looking out over the dark blue waters of the Dampier Strait and distant mountain ranges, Eco Resort is a cluster of authentic Papuan style water bungalows built from locally sourced materials with 3 room types to choose from.

Ready to explore Raja Ampat with Diving Resorts? [Click here](#) to learn more about us and what we offer, and to book your Raja Ampat holiday with the best rates and inclusions.