

# The whiplash shark



By Jamie Watts and Malcolm Nobbs

**After an uncivilised early start, Malcolm found himself in the dawn twilight at 30 metres, atop an uninspiring rubble reef shoal. But the hour, the surroundings and the early light didn't temper an excitement that had been building for years;**

**I** will never forget my first sighting of a Thresher Shark. I was both thrilled and stunned. With its disproportionately large eyes and huge slender scythe-like tail, half the length of its body, it's appearance is unlike that of any other shark. I have been privileged to see and photograph many sharks but this species is particularly special.' ▼

The three species of threshers (although recent DNA studies suggest there may be a fourth) are all rather large, partly warm-blooded sharks, most closely akin to the great white and its cousins. If you ignore the length of that enormous, elegant tapering tail, threshers are similar in size and build to the larger and bulkier requiem sharks - maybe most similar to an oceanic whitetip or silky - or to the threshers' slightly closer cousins the makos and porbeagles. The smallest species, the Pelagic Thresher found at Monad shoals and right through the warm Indo-Pacific, matures at about the same size and bulk as a human, at about 12 years old. A large adult female might be two metres long to the fork in her tail and weigh 100 kilos, and with the long upper tail over three and a half metres in total length.