

# New England Basking Shark and Ocean Sunfish Project

[www.nebshark.org](http://www.nebshark.org)



**NEBShark**

*New England Basking Shark Project*



**NEOSunfish**

*New England Ocean Sunfish Project*

Report your sightings of basking sharks and ocean sunfish!

**Your efforts will help us learn more about these majestic leviathans of our oceans.**

**NEBShark and NEOSunfish** are projects with the New England Coastal Wildlife Alliance (NECWA), a nonprofit organization that protects and conserves the unique coastal marine wildlife off New England waters. Help us learn more about basking sharks and ocean sunfish by reporting sightings of these fish seen from a beach or from a boat offshore. Both basking sharks and ocean sunfish migrate great distances to feed in the waters off New England during the spring, summer and fall, yet we know little about their biology and ecology.

## ***How to get involved?***

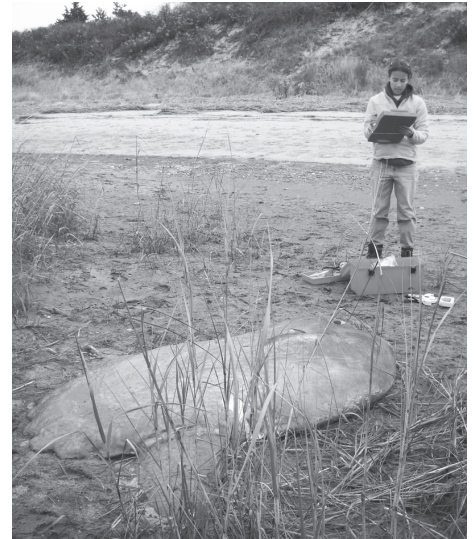
If you see a basking shark or ocean sunfish swimming offshore, or stranded on a beach, please contact NEBShark.

For live sightings of animals offshore:

- go to [www.nebshark.org](http://www.nebshark.org) and input your sighting online.
- or mail in one of our NEBShark Sighting Cards.

For stranded animals on a beach:

- contact NEBShark immediately by calling 508-566-0009.



## ***What information do I report?***

- date and time of sighting
- general sighting location: ex. "2 miles off Race Point, Provincetown."
- latitude and longitude of sighting. (If you don't have GPS in the field, use Google Earth to get this info.)
- # of animals observed
- behavior of animal or animals observed (ex. traveling, feeding at the surface, circling, etc.)

## ***Should I take photographs? Absolutely!***

If you report your sighting online, you can attach your photos directly to your report. Or send photos to [info@nebshark.org](mailto:info@nebshark.org) and indicate the sighting report that they go with.

- take photos of the entire body, especially the head area to determine if the animal is feeding
- take photos of the dorsal fin, pigmentation patterns as well as scars or cuts on the body

New England Basking Shark and Ocean Sunfish Project  
[www.nebshark.org](http://www.nebshark.org) PO Box 92, North Carver MA 02355

## The Basking Shark (*Cetorhinus maximus*)

The basking shark is one of the largest fish in the world, second only in size to the whale shark. These animals are typically 20 to 25 feet long, but adults can reach lengths of 39 feet (12 meters) and weigh up to 8,500 pounds (3,900 kilos). Although giants in size, basking sharks are filter feeders that trap tiny organisms like copepods from the water. Scientists from the MA Division of Marine Fisheries are tagging basking sharks and this information is helping to better understand their distribution and migratory habits. And sighting reports provided by NEBShark compliment this information by providing detailed information about the occurrence and movements of basking sharks in our New England waters.

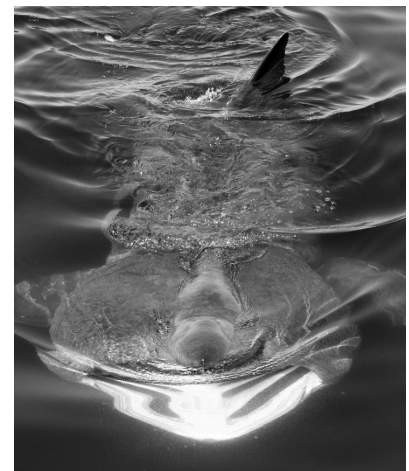
## The Ocean Sunfish (*Mola mola*)

The ocean sunfish is the heaviest bony fish in the world! This odd-looking animal migrates into our cold waters to feed on jellyfish, ctenophores and other gelatinous critters. When offshore, ocean sunfish spend a great deal of time on their sides at the water's surface. No one knows why they do this, but this behavior makes them susceptible to fast moving vessels, both large and small.

As winter approaches, ocean sunfish migrate south to warmer waters. Some ocean sunfish become trapped by the physical presence of Cape Cod or get caught in back bay areas. As water temperatures drop, these fish become "cold-stunned" and can't function normally. Eventually, these unfortunate animals get washed ashore, more often dead than alive. Call NECWA for we respond to live and dead animals that are stranding or have stranded on our New England beaches.

To learn more, visit us at [www.nebshark.org](http://www.nebshark.org) and [www.necwa.org](http://www.necwa.org). Also, keep informed about our recent projects and activities by visiting our NECWA News blog at [www.necwanews.blogspot.com](http://www.necwanews.blogspot.com).

The New England Coastal Wildlife Alliance (NECWA) manages the New England Basking Shark and Ocean Sunfish Project. We collaborate with many organizations including Bridgewater State University, Mass Audubon at Wellfleet Bay, Captain John Whale Watching and Fishing Tours and the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries.



### NEBShark Mail-in Sighting Card

**Basking Shark Identification Features:** Typically, it is the large, triangular dorsal fin that alerts you to the presence of a basking shark at the water's surface. Look into the water to see if the animal is filter feeding or traveling with other basking sharks.



large dorsal fin visible at surface



both the dorsal fin + caudal (tail) fin visible at surface



mouth open = animal is filter feeding

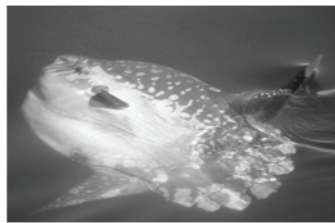


mouth closed = not feeding

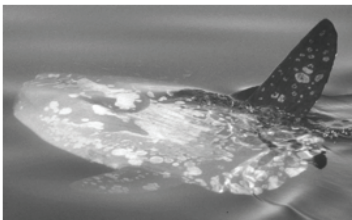


Basking shark swimming just beneath the water's surface with only the tip of the first dorsal fin showing. You can see the greenish-white patch near the mouth indicating that the basking shark is filter feeding.

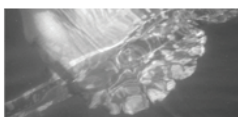
**Ocean Sunfish Identification Features:** The common sunfish (*Mola mola*) is the species of ocean sunfish most commonly seen in New England waters. Common sunfish can be 6 – 10 feet long and have a very distinctive caudal (tail) fin that is very short and rounded in appearance.



Common sunfish basking on surface with left side up.



Dorsal fin of common sunfish visible above water's surface.



The rounded tail fin of the common sunfish (*Mola mola*).

To receive mail-in sighting cards, send \$1 to NEBShark  
PO Box 92  
North Carver, MA 02355

To receive our stranding key tag for ocean sunfish and sea turtles, send \$1 to NEBShark  
PO Box 92  
North Carver, MA 02355



To report an offshore sighting of a live basking shark or ocean sunfish go to [www.nebshark.org](http://www.nebshark.org)

To report a stranded animal, call 508-566-0009.