

Reef sites

Sharks that eat sharks: opportunistic predation by wobbegongs

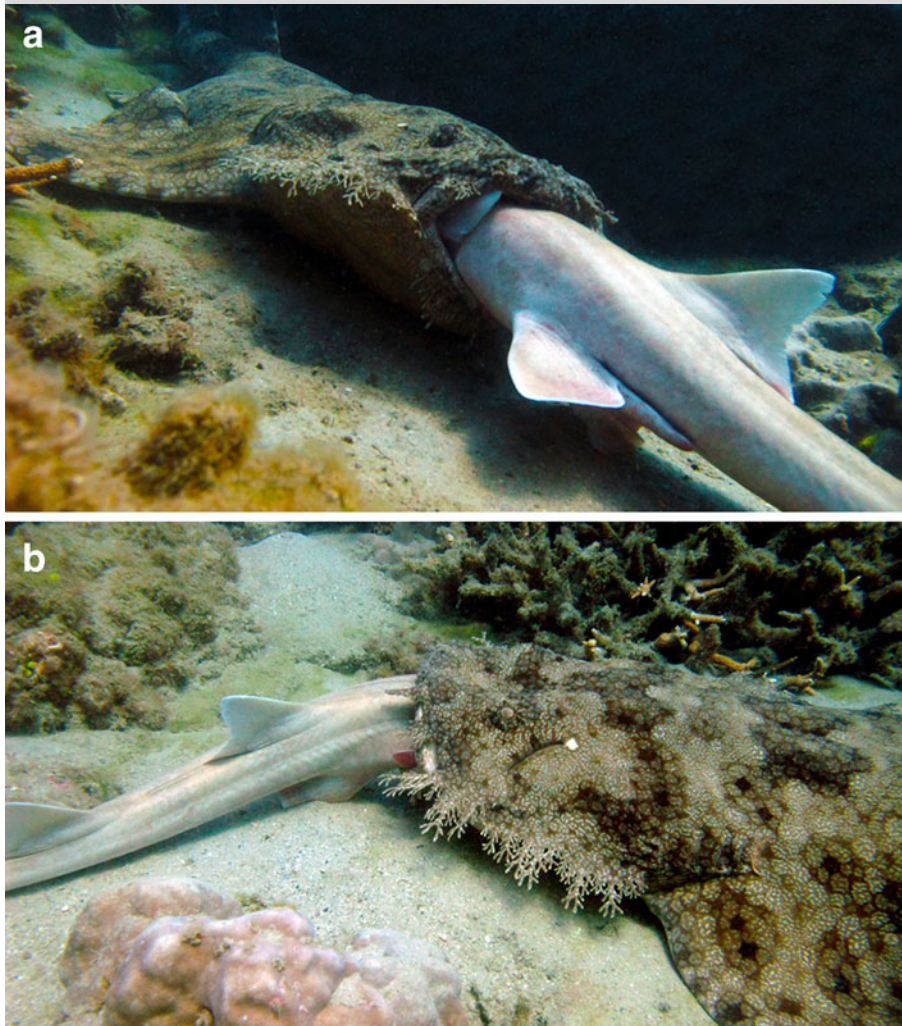


Fig. 1 a, b Predation of *Chiloscyllium punctatum* by *Eucrossorhinus dasypogon* in the Keppel Islands, Great Barrier Reef, Australia (Photo: Tom Mannering)

Wobbegong sharks (family Orectolobidae) are demersal ambush predators of benthic invertebrates, cephalopods, teleost fishes, and, in larger species, occasionally other sharks (Compagno 2001; Huvneers et al. 2007). Field observations of predation events are rare on coral reefs, and trophic status is usually assigned using stomach content data from collected specimens (Huvneers et al. 2007).

At midday on 1 August 2011, while conducting an underwater visual census of fishes on the fringing reef of Great Keppel Island (Great Barrier Reef, Australia), the authors encountered a tasselled wobbegong shark (*Eucrossorhinus dasypogon*, ~125 cm TL) lying on the substratum with the head of a brown-banded bamboo shark (*Chiloscyllium punctatum*, ~100 cm TL) in its mouth (Fig. 1). During the 30-min observation period, neither shark moved position and the wobbegong did not further ingest the bamboo shark. We assume that it would have taken at least several more hours for the wobbegong to completely consume the bamboo shark. Generally, *E. dasypogon* is known to prey upon invertebrates and small demersal fish, but this unusual field observation highlights its versatility as an ambush predator. With a jaw structure that facilitates dislocation, a large gape, and sharp, rearward-pointing teeth, wobbegongs can grasp relatively large prey before swallowing it whole (Wilga et al. 2007; Prof. J.H. Choat *pers. comm.*).

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