

**Biophilia is a well-documented phenomenon that suggests through culture and experience, humans are attracted to certain physical elements in order to sustain biological evolution.** The term “biophilia” is defined as the “love of life or living systems.” In our society, sharks have received the wrong impression due to their appearance and bad reputation perpetuated in popular culture and media. Though sharks have been alive for more than 400 million years their populations have declined drastically due to human actions over the last three decades. It is estimated that 100 million sharks die each year due to bycatch, longline fishing and finning. It is believed that some species populations have been depleted 30–50%. Oceana reports that of the 307 remaining shark species, 50 are listed at vulnerable, endangered or critically endangered.

**Ocean4 specializes in creating an interactive, educational experience for aquarium visitors. Ocean4 uses art as a vehicle to bring conservation issues to light while challenging people to engage on a deeper level. People absorb information in a variety of ways including those that are visual, tactile and often unconventional.** In particular, children learn mostly through tactile or kinetic learning. This type of learning through hands-on experience involving

## CRITICALLY ENDANGERED CHONDRICHTHYTES

SOURCED FROM IUCN

- Knifetooth Sawfish | *Anoxypristis Cuspidata*
- Pondicherry Shark | *Carcharhinus Hemiodon*
- Harrison's Deepsea Dogfish | *Centrophorus Harrisoni*
- Blue Skate | *Dipturus Batis*
- Ornate Sleeper Ray | *Electrolux Addisoni*
- Ganges Shark | *Glyphis Gangeticus*
- New Guinea River Shark | *Glyphis Garricki*
- Irrawaddy River Shark | *Glyphis Siamensis*
- Formerly The Natal Shyshark | *Haploblepharus Kistnasamyi*
- Daggernose Shark | *Isogomphodon Oxyrhynchus*
- Maltese Skate Or Ray | *Leucoraja Melitensis*
- Striped Smooth-Hound | *Mustelus Fasciatus*
- Caribbean Electric Ray | *Narcine Bancroftii*
- Pita Skate | *Okamejei Pita*
- Queensland Sawfish | *Pristis Clavata*
- Largetooth Sawfish | *Pristis Microdon*
- Wide Sawfish | *Pristis Pectinata*
- Largetooth Sawfish | *Pristis Perotteti*
- Narrowsnout Sawfish | *Pristis Zijsron*
- Brazilian Guitarfish | *Rhinobatos Horkelii*
- Sawback Angelshark | *Squatina Aculeata*
- Smoothback Angel Shark | *Squatina Oculata*
- Angel Shark | *Squatina Squatina*
- Java Stingaree | *Urolophus Javanicus*



# RETHINKING SHARKS

Biophilia,  
Interactive Art,  
and Education  
Up Close.

OCEAN4  
Where the Oceans Meet Art



touch, movement, and interaction allows them to engage all of their senses, thereby, activating their minds. It is crucial that children grow up with a deep appreciation for the oceans to ensure their survival.

To test the effectiveness of the biophilia connection between humans and sharks, an exhibit displaying a shiver of sharks dressed as soft-textured, approachable animals was installed. The shark bodies themselves were weighted to give the impression these bodies were real. The viewer could walk in and around the hanging sharks, allowing them to touch and fully experience the exhibit. **The purpose of this installation is to invite the viewers to question their attitudes towards sharks.** It is easy to justify protecting or saving an animal perceived as “adorable”, such as polar bears, puppies, or chimpanzees. Features such as oversized eyes and ears, along with a soft fur texture, instantly appeal to humans.

Viewers had an instant “aha” moment in the installation once they realized the fur covered forms represented sharks. The soft textured bodies created an emotional connection. The message perpetrated through the exhibit struck viewers more strongly than just stating, “Sharks are important. We should protect them.” **The result was an increased awareness of the importance of sharks and awareness of the viewer’s own negative perceptions.**

**In conservation, the first step to creating action is to create awareness.** Population control via natural predatory hierarchy and overall oceanic health depends on this misrepresented animal. As an apex predator, sharks are crucial to maintaining a balanced ecosystem. A depletion of any one species, throws off the equilibrium, which, in turn, will not only affect the oceans, but humans as well.

**This installation combined with educational materials, lectures, marketing and media is the heart of what Ocean4 does. It is education up close. By combining art and science, an unforgettable experience is created in which viewers are more likely to walk away contemplative, having truly seen rather than just looked.**

