

Sharks and Rays: Myth and Reality

Week 5

Mating and Fertilization

Dr. Marcelo Carvalho: Using the claspers dissected from another male specimen, we can show how insemination actually occurs in sharks. Only one clasper tip is inserted in the female, remaining in position, as seen here. Both sharks are facing the same direction. Female sharks generally have thicker skin than males, about three times as thick. The male actually bites the female quite a bit before copulation, and he will hold on to her using his mouth.

Once a sperm is inserted inside the cloaca of the female, it will have to make its way through the uterus and oviduct all the way up to the top part of the oviduct near the ostium where fertilization occurs. After fertilization, the egg then migrates down through the shell gland to rest in the uterus, where gestation occurs.