

FLAPPER & BLUE SKATE STAY SKATE SAVVY



IDENTIFYING, SAFELY RELEASING, AND RECORDING BYCATCH OF SKATES AND RAYS

THIS GUIDE IS TO HELP YOU...



IDENTIFY DIFFERENT SKATES AND RAYS [2-8]

SAFELY HANDLE AND RELEASE SKATES AND RAYS [9-10]

RECORD SKATE AND RAY BYCATCH AND DISCARDS [11]

CONTRIBUTE TO RESEARCH VIA THE CLEAN CATCH APP [12]

THE IMPORTANCE OF TELLING APART FLAPPER & BLUE SKATES



Flapper and blue skate are now recognised as two separate species. It is important to record in your logbook the code of the species you have accidentally caught and the quantity.

This will help improve understanding of the individual stocks of these Critically Endangered animals.

**FLAPPER
SKATE
(Code: DRJ)**



**BLUE SKATE
(Code: RJB)**



KEY WAYS TO ID



FLAPPER SKATE

Dipturus intermedius

Considered **Critically Endangered** in the UK and highly vulnerable to bycatch.

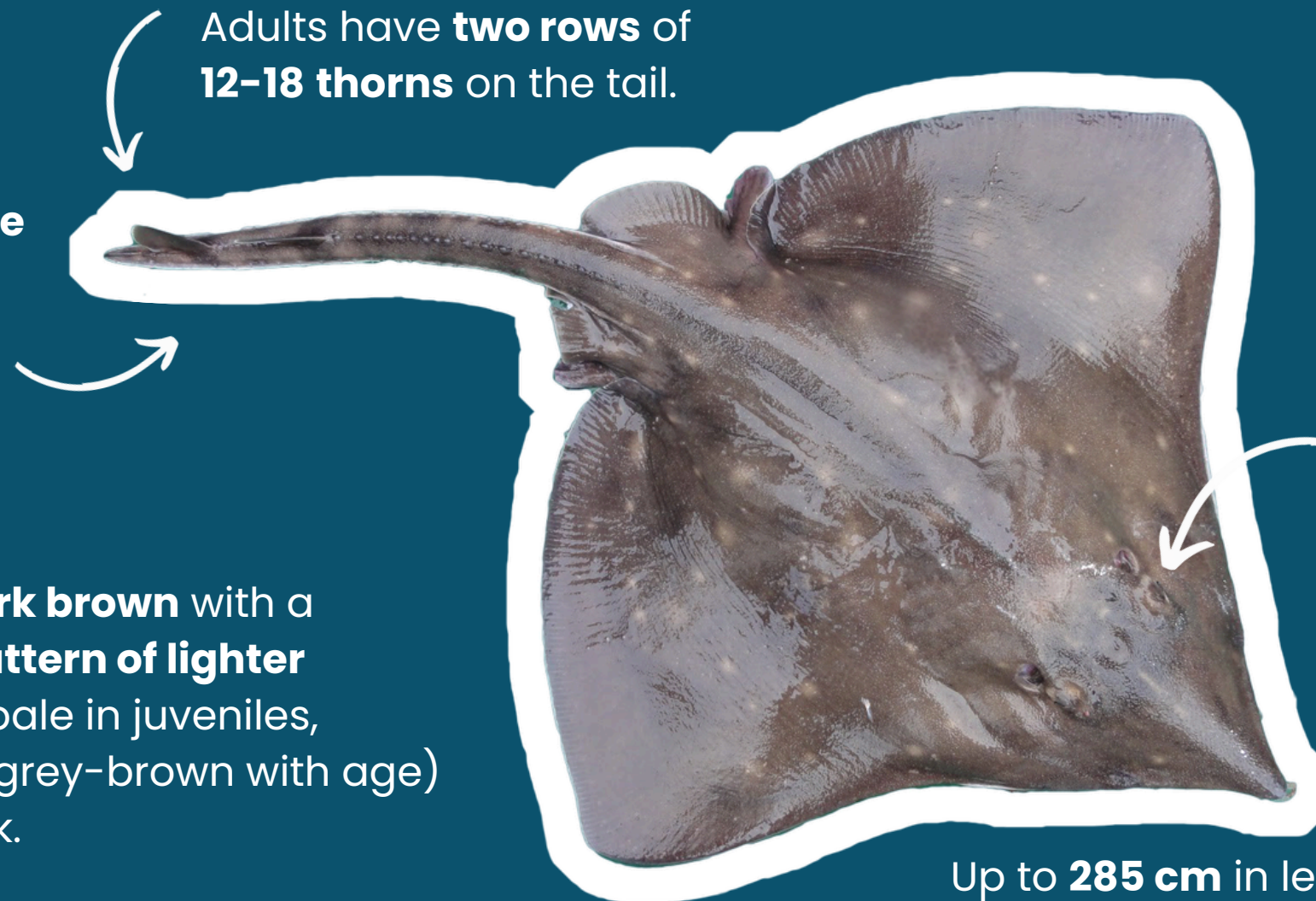


AKA: COMMON SKATE, GREY SKATE

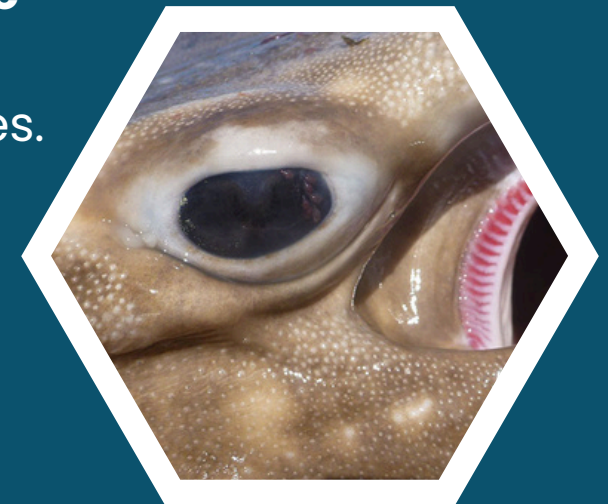


Lateral thorns on the tail **point towards the head** of the animal.

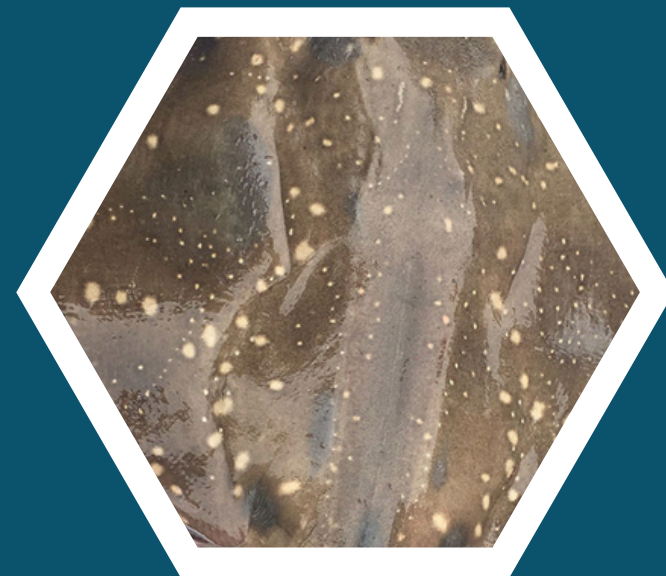
Adults have **two rows** of **12-18 thorns** on the tail.



Dark olive-green iris of the eyes.



Up to **285 cm** in length.
(Juveniles **30-35cm**).



Olive to dark brown with a variable **pattern of lighter blotches** (pale in juveniles, becoming grey-brown with age) on the back.

Juveniles start out with a **pale blotchy back** and a **noticeably darker underside**, and **only a single row** of thorns on their tail.

**VIEW THE
SHARK TRUST'S
FLAPPER SKATE ID GUIDE**



FLAPPER SKATE ON DECK & UP CLOSE



A female flapper skate
onboard (carefully placed
on a release mat).

A male flapper skate
has a **pair of**
claspers near the
base of the tail.



KEY WAYS TO ID



BLUE SKATE

Dipturus batis

Considered **Critically Endangered** in the UK and in decline.



AKA: COMMON SKATE, GREY SKATE

Lateral spines on the side of the tail **point out at right-angles**.

Row of **12-31 thorns** along the tail.

Oval eyespots on inner wings, with a **yellowish margin** and **darker centre**.

Brown colouring on top, often with **pale spots and streaks**.

Pale-yellow iris.

Dark grey underneath, becoming paler with age.

Up to **150 cm** in length.
(Juveniles **22-23cm**)

Black sensory pores visible on top and underside.

Juvenile blue skates typically have a **pronounced long snout**, a **brown/olive green coloured back**, and a **dark grey underside**.

**VIEW THE
SHARK TRUST'S
BLUE SKATE ID GUIDE**



BLUE SKATE ON DECK & UP CLOSE



**A blue skate
onboard**
(carefully placed
on a release mat).



A male blue skate
has a **pair of
claspers** near the
base of the tail.



TELLING FLAPPER AND BLUE SKATES APART



FLAPPER SKATE

Dipturus intermedius

Lateral thorns on the tail of the flapper skate **point towards the head** of the animal.

Dark olive-green iris.

Flapper skates are **larger** than the blue skate. A skate over 2 m is most likely to be a flapper skate.

Has a **loose grouping** of light-coloured spots.



Snout is **more** pronounced and 'sharper'.



BLUE SKATE

Dipturus batis

Lateral thorns on the tail of the blue skate **point outwards, perpendicular to the tail**.

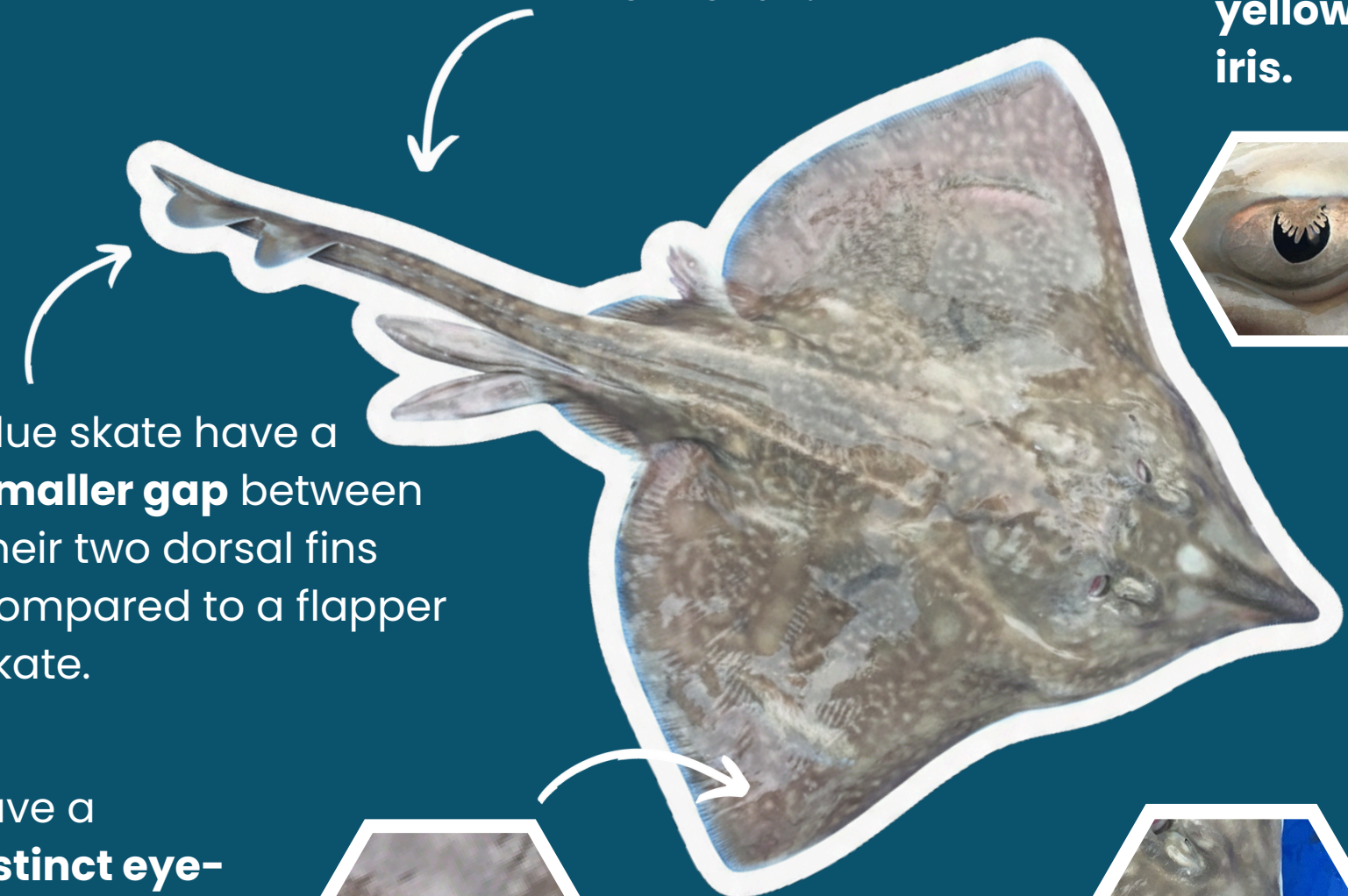
Pale-yellow iris.

Blue skate have a **smaller gap** between their two dorsal fins compared to a flapper skate.

Have a **distinct eye-spot** on each wing.



Snout is **less** pronounced and 'blunter'.



OTHERS TO LOOK OUT FOR



The UK's waters are home to many other skates and rays. Here are some of those you may encounter, their names, and handling caution.

E ELECTRIC **V** VENOMOUS **!** THORNS & BARBS



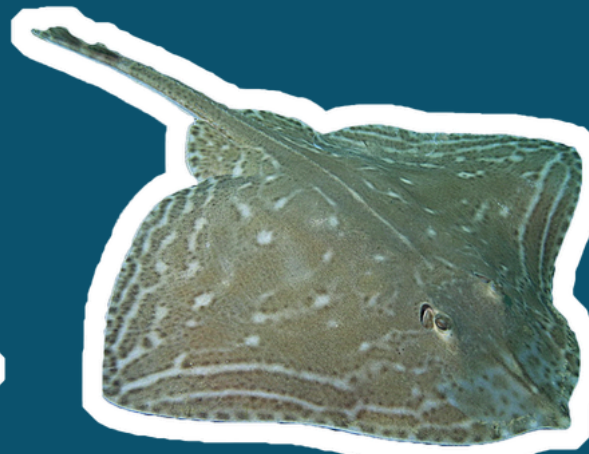
ATLANTIC
TORPEDO RAY



STARRY RAY/
THORNY SKATE



SPOTTED
RAY



SMALL-EYED
RAY



WHITE
SKATE



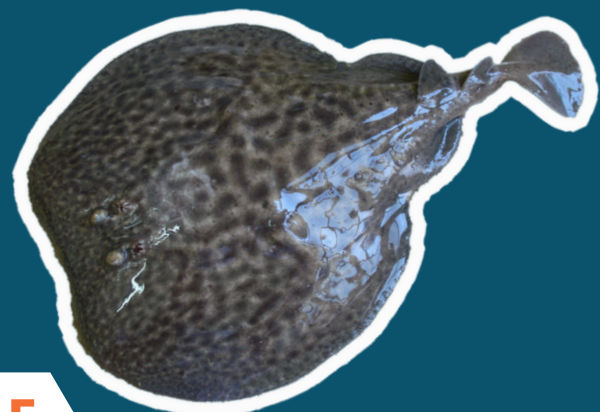
BLONDE
RAY



LONGNOSED
SKATE



COMMON EAGLE
RAY



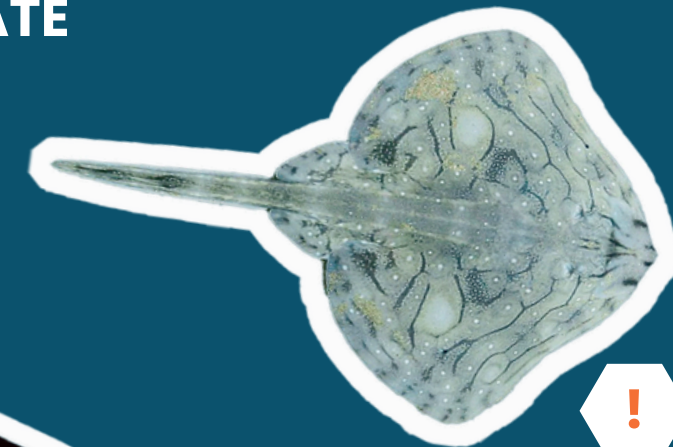
MARBLED
ELECTRIC RAY



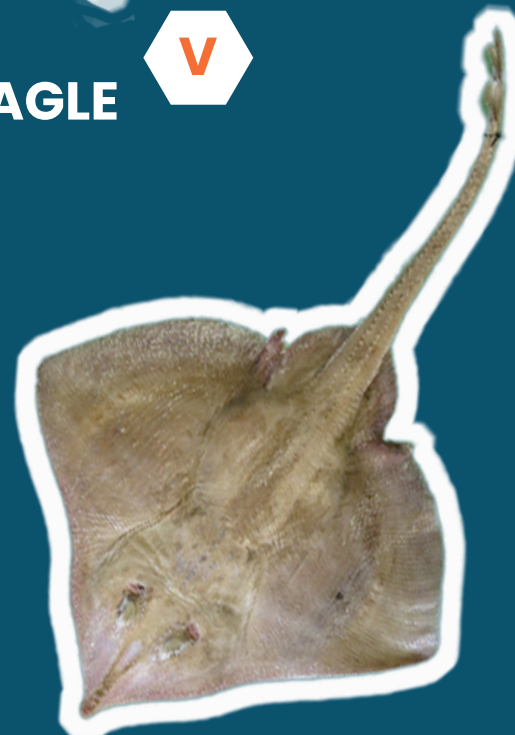
CUCKOO
RAY



COMMON
STINGRAY



UNDULATE
RAY



SHAGREEN
RAY

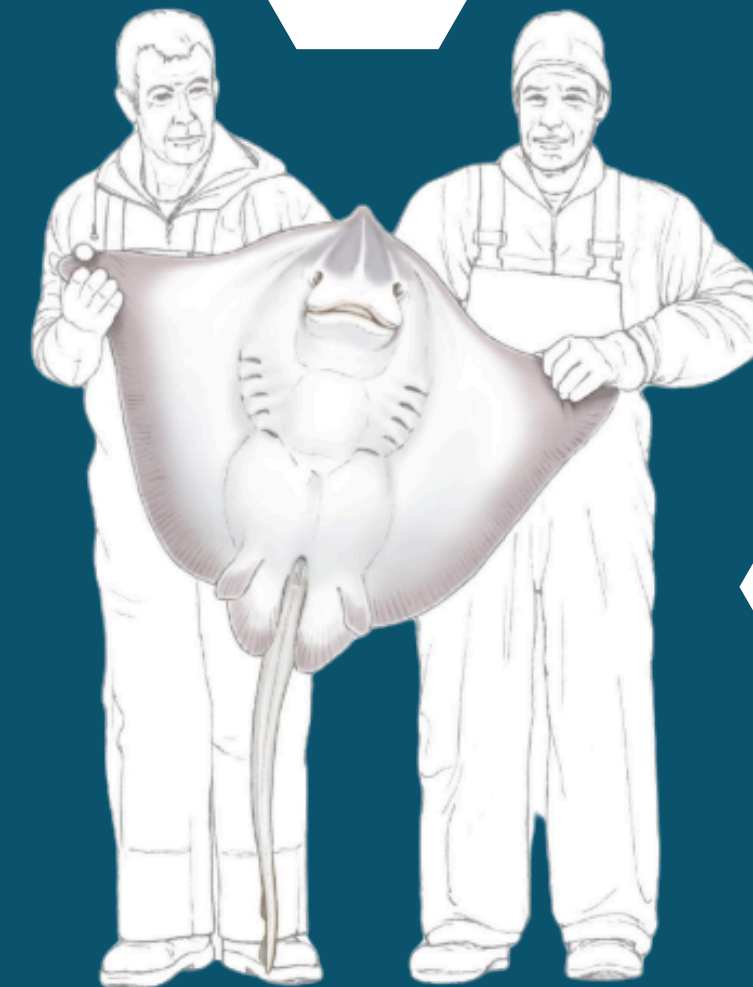
SAFE HANDLING & RELEASE

Safe handling and release can greatly improve the chances of survival for a skate or ray. Here's how to minimise the risk of stress or injury, for both the animal and you.

For your safety, before handling the animal, ensure that you've identified if it is a species that produces electric shocks or has a venomous barb on its tail (see page 8, and pages 25–30 of the [Clean Catch Wildlife ID Guide](#)). **Guidance on handling these species is provided overleaf.**

- **Always lift a skate or ray to move it**, using both hands and working together with another person if possible.
- **Support the skate or ray under its mid-body and near the base of the tail.**
- **Avoid touching the gills and spiracles**, as these can be easily damaged.
- **Avoid dragging or holding the animal solely by its tail**, as this could injure you or the animal.
- Avoid bringing onboard unless absolutely necessary. For larger animals, **use a trawl mat or dedicated release board** to help move them to the side of the boat or chute.
- Gently **slide the animal overboard head-first or 'wing-first'** to avoid falls or impact from height.

LARGER
SPECIES



SMALLER
SPECIES



Shark Trust Illustrations (C) Marc Dando

GENERAL SAFETY GEAR

- **Wear heavy duty protective gloves and long sleeves or oil skins** to avoid 'burn' from contact with the animal's rough skin.
- **Use long-handled tools** (for cutting hooks or tangled rope), and **use a soft rope to help stabilise or guide larger animals if absolutely necessary.**
- **Never use a gaff!**

AVOIDING THORNS, VENOMOUS BARBS, & ELECTRIC SHOCKS

Some skates and rays have sharp thorns along their tail and back, or can inflict life-threatening injury from venomous barbs or electric shocks. Take great caution when handling these species to minimise the risk of injury to yourself or others.

Although rare, some electric ray species can be found in UK waters. Specialised equipment can help you to safely handle these species.

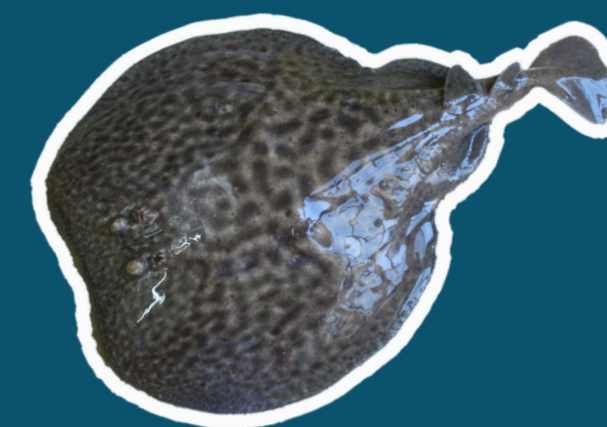
SAFETY GEAR FOR ELECTRIC SPECIES

- **Insulating gloves:** Always wear industrial-strength thick rubber gloves to avoid direct contact.
- **Non-metal tools:** Use non-conductive tools like wooden poles, plastic tongs, or soft rope to help guide the animal safely back to the water.
- **Insulated boots:** Always wear insulated rubber deck boots.
- **Rubber mats:** Place the ray on a rubber mat or insulating surface to avoid grounding the electrical charge through the boat's deck, especially if it's wet.

Flapper and blue skates have sharp thorns on their tails. **Wear protective gloves to avoid contact with these.**



Electric species you may encounter in UK waters include the **marbled electric ray** and the **Atlantic torpedo ray**.



**MARBLED
ELECTRIC RAY**



**ATLANTIC
TORPEDO RAY**

THE LAW ON RECORDING BYCATCH

THERE ARE NO PENALTIES FOR ACCIDENTALLY CATCHING PROHIBITED SHARKS, SKATES, AND RAYS – BUT **YOU MUST LOG SUCH EVENTS**

Accidental bycatch of flapper and blue skate and other prohibited sharks, skates, and rays must be recorded in your vessel logbook, as part of fishing vessel licence conditions.

Why is recording bycatch of these animals important?

- Data provided by you and other fishermen can help to improve knowledge about these often data-limited species.
- Better data supports the setting of sustainable catch limits.
- Healthy populations of sharks, skates, and rays are part of a healthy, balanced ecosystem.



Targeting or retaining either flapper or blue skate is prohibited.



Species regulations can change. Follow the QR code to stay up to date with the latest regulations for sharks, skates, and rays in your region.

HELP US BE SKATE SAVVY: GET THE CLEAN CATCH SELF-REPORTING APP



With the Clean Catch self-reporting app, your data could do even more to improve knowledge and sustainable management of flapper and blue skate, and other sharks, skates, and rays.

The Clean Catch Self-Reporting App:

- A completely voluntary “add-on” for recording bycatch of and other interactions with sensitive marine species (including sharks, skates, rays, dolphins, porpoises, whales, seals, and seabirds).
- Lets users log their bycatch and catch, see their own fishing data over time, and get alerts for any bycatch hotspots identified by other app users.
- Developed and tested in close collaboration with fishermen.
- Designed to be practical and easy to use at sea.
- Available to all UK fishermen.

Visit the **Clean Catch website** for more information on how to register to use the app, and how the data you submit through the app will be protected.

All app users must still record shark, skate, and ray bycatch in vessel logbooks.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & FURTHER INFO



This guidance has been developed by Clean Catch and The Shark Trust in collaboration with the UK fishing industry. We would like to thank all the fishermen and other representatives who gave us their time and expert insights.



Looking for information on ways to avoid bycatch as well as recording it and safely handling and releasing animals? Head to the [Clean Catch Bycatch Mitigation Hub](#) to explore our “library” of mitigation measures.



[Clean Catch](#) champions collaborative working to help monitor and minimise the bycatch of sensitive marine species in UK fisheries, and facilitates the exchange of knowledge globally.

[The Shark Trust](#) works globally to improve the conservation status of sharks, skates and rays. Advocating for policy changes. And generating collective action to support their goals.



**Clean
Catch**



STAY SKATE SAVVY



Clean
Catch

Joint Action on Sensitive Species Bycatch



SHARK
— TRUST —