FLAPPER & BLUE SKATE STAY SKATE SAVVY

SHARK TRUST

Clean Catch
Joint Action on Sensitive Species Bycatch



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

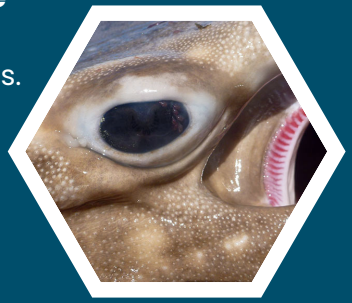


Lateral thorns on the tail **point towards the head** of the animal.

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



Dark olive-green iris of the eyes.





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

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

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

Image Credit: © Bache-Jeffreys, M., de Moraes, B.L.C., Ball, R.E./commons.wikimedia.org & close-ups from the Orkney Skate Trust

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.



Images © The Orkney Skate Trust

KEY WAYS TO ID

BLUE SKATE

Dipturus batis

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

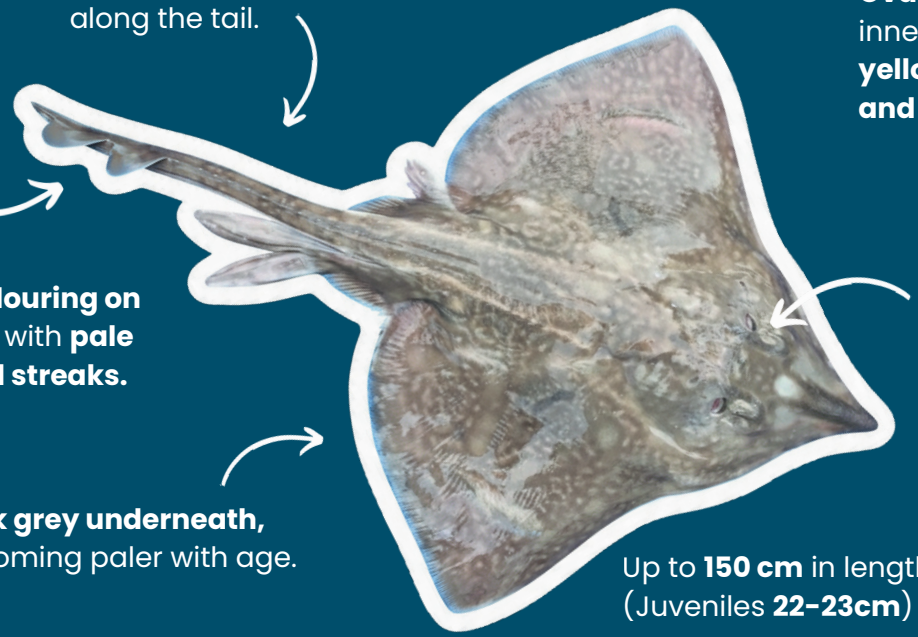
AKA: COMMON SKATE, GREY SKATE

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

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



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



Dark grey underneath, becoming paler with age.

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

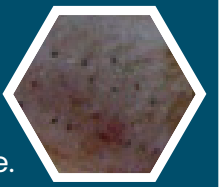
Oval eyespots on inner wings, with a **yellowish margin and darker centre.**



Pale-yellow iris.



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

Image Credit: © Gonzalo Mucientes Sandoval/inaturalist.org & close-ups © The Orkney Skate Trust

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.



Images © The Orkney Skate Trust

TELLING FLAPPER AND BLUE SKATES APART

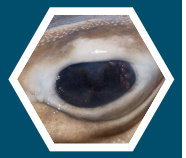
FLAPPER SKATE

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.

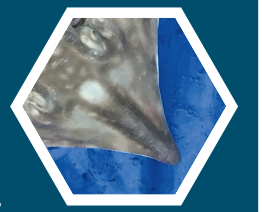


Blue skate have a **smaller gap** between their two dorsal fins compared to a flapper skate.

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



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ATLANTIC TORPEDO RAY



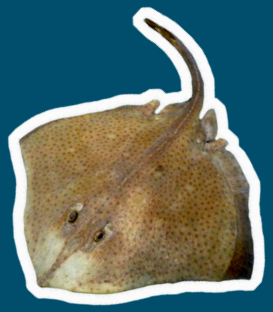
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STARRY RAY/ THORNY SKATE



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SPOTTED RAY



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BLONDE RAY



LONGNOSED SKATE !



COMMON EAGLE RAY V



WHITE SKATE !

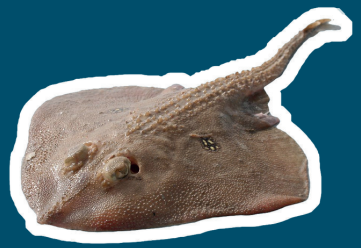


SMALL-EYED RAY !



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MARBLED ELECTRIC RAY

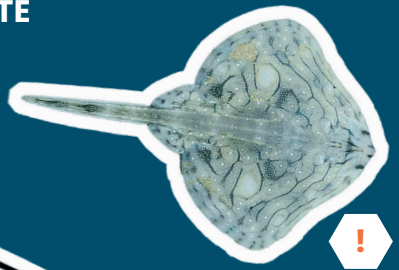


CUCKOO RAY !



V

COMMON STINGRAY



UNDULATE RAY !

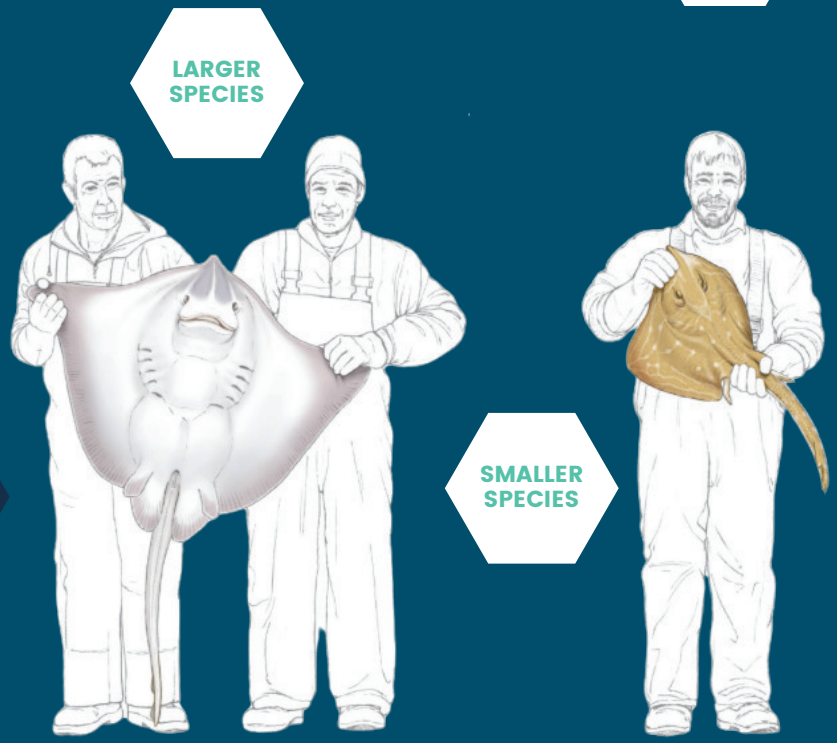


SHAGREEN RAY !

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.



Shark Trust Illustrations (C) Marc Dando

- **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.

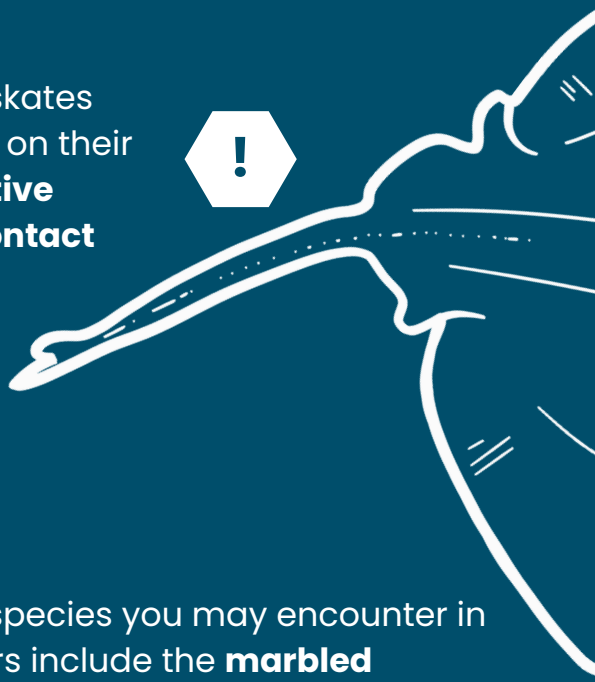
GENERAL SAFETY GEAR

- **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.

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



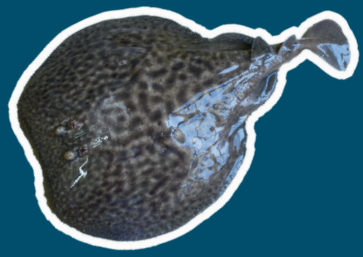
Although rare, some electric ray species can be found in UK waters. Specialised equipment can help you to safely handle these species.

SAFETY GEAR FOR ELECTRIC SPECIES

E

- **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.

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

Targeting or retaining either flapper or blue skate is prohibited.

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.



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 faciliates 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.

STAY SKATE SAVVY



Clean Catch

Joint Action on Sensitive Species Bycatch

SHARK TRUST