

WHAT'S THE SCOOP?



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SAWFISH



One of a small number of species in which the body has developed a long, horizontally flattened, blade-like snout, fitted with several tooth-like denticles (rostral teeth) on either side to resemble a saw. They are usually found on shallow sandy bottoms where they may use the saw to locate crustacean prey buried in the sand. They also use the slashing movement of the saw to stun or even impale small fish on the teeth. There is also a small group of sharks which have evolved a similar anatomical adaptation. Despite having a shark-like form and deriving their propulsion from their tails, sawfish are rays which all have their gill slits situated on the underside, while sharks have their gill slits on their flanks. Inside their mother, the saws of the developing embryos are enveloped in protective tissue to prevent damage to the mother during development and birth. Sawfish often enter estuaries, most of which have become badly degraded by human disturbance. Their snouts make them extremely vulnerable to capture in any form of net; as a result, they are rarely found outside sanctuary areas and are regarded as being locally extinct in South Africa.

Scientific Name:	<i>Pristis spp</i>
AKA:	Sawfish
Ocean Hang out:	Indian, mainly tropical waters; Confined to the seabed, may enter estuarine systems
Warm/Cool Waters:	Warm
Diet:	Small fish and various shellfish
Slow/ Fast:	Slow, rests on sandy bottom
S/ M/ L/ XL/ XXL:	XL
Shy/ Bold:	Shy
At the beach/ In the sea: (Inhabits coastal or oceanic waters)	Close inshore including estuaries
Local/ International: (Endemic/ Non-native)	International, in most coastal tropical waters
Nomadic/ Homely: (Migratory or resident)	Generally homely, but large enough to swim long distances
Social/ Anti-social: (Normally found in groups or solitary)	Anti-social (Solitary)
Black Tie/ Eccentric: (Easily recognisable as a shark or ray or has a unique appearance)	Eccentric
Teeth:	Small, flattened in numerous transverse rows
Best Feature:	Flattened snout with numerous saw-like teeth along each edge
Red Listing:	Critically Endangered (IUCN 2013)