

Bowmouth Guitarfish

Rhina ancylostoma

Family – Rhinidae



Also known as Sharkfin guitarfish, Mud skate, Shark ray and Boogbek-sandkruiper (Afrikaans)

Description

The bowmouth guitarfish has a broad, rounded snout, wing-like pectoral fins and 2-3 ridges of spiky dermal denticles over the head and back. It may attain a length of up to 2.7 metres. The lower jaw has 3 protruding lobes that fit into three depressions in the upper jaw. They have approximately 47 rows of teeth on the upper jaw and 50 rows on the lower jaw.

Distribution

Bowmouth guitarfish are widely found throughout the tropical coastal waters of the Indo-Pacific, from the Red Sea in the west, reaching as far south as KZN (South Africa) and to Japan and New South Wales in the east.

Habitat

The bowmouth guitarfish usually occurs inshore over sandy, muddy, rubble areas and inshore coral reefs, but is also found to depths of 90m.

Reproduction

Males attain sexual maturity at 1.5-1.8m. These fish display aplacental viviparous reproduction with litter sizes of 4-9. Embryos are sustained by yolk.

Feeding

They prey on crustaceans and shelled invertebrates

Behaviour

The bowmouth guitarfish tends to be more active at night. They use the thorns (denticles) on their neck and back as a defence mechanism by butting predators.

Threats

Their large pectoral fins are greatly valued as a food source in Asia. Other threats include habitat destruction and degradation. A known predator is the tiger shark. They are caught intentionally and incidentally by trawlers, gillnets and line gear. Numbers are known to have declined in Indonesian waters, where these fish are targeted by guitarfish gillnet fisheries. Australia has had some success with reduced bycatch of this species due to the inclusion of Turtle excluder devices and by also introducing laws prohibiting shark-finning practices.

Conservation

The IUCN has listed this species as “vulnerable”.