SAWFISH INFORMATION BULLETIN



ICAR- Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute P.B. No. 1603, Ernakulam North P.O., Kochi 682018 Sawfish are cartilaginous fishes. They resemble sharks with a long narrow rostrum with sharp teeth on either side, resembling a saw.

But they are in fact cousins of sharks and are actually rays.

They are found in tropical and sub tropical seas and freshwater lakes and rivers around the world.

Of primitive origin, they have been inhabitants of the earth much earlier than human beings.

Five species of sawfish are known to occur globally - Largetooth sawfish *Pristis pristis*, Smalltooth sawfish *Pristis pectinata*, Green sawfish *Pristis zijsron*, Dwarf sawfish *Pristis clavata* and Narrow sawfish *Anoxypristis cuspidata*.

Rostrum-ingredient in traditional medicines, offered to the temple deity, ornamental artefact and a weapon

Liver-medicinal oil, vitamin A crude oil is a lubricant while boat repairing

Largetooth

sawfish

Sawfish recorded in India

Green

sawfish

Dwarf

sawfish

Historical Utilization

Narrow

sawfish

Meat- food for human

Fins-soup preparation

Distributional range of

sawfish in India

Dwarf sawfish

Green sawfish

Narrow sawfish &

Largetooth sawfish

Skin- sword scabbards and as sandpaper to polish wood on boats



Rostrum contains sensory organs that help in detecting prey, while the rostral teeth assist in stunning them.

Appendix I of CITES -All international commercial trade in sawfish or their parts is strictly prohibited

Threats to sawfish population

Intense fishing

Habitat loss

Coastal development & pollution

Long generation length

Population decline of sawfish

How can we safeguard the sawfish?

- · Avoid or restrict gillnetting in their natural habitats
- Release live sawfish caught in the fishing nets
- Protect natural habitat of sawfish
- · Adopt best-practice code of coastal development
- Education and communication of sawfish conservation

Although fishermen are aware of the protected status of sawfishes, increased outreach programs and greater stakeholder involvement are still necessary to effectively safeguard the remaining sawfishes in India.

- The main threat to sawfish is accidental capture, especially in trawl nets and gillnets
- Unlike typical teleost fish, sawfish have a long lifespan, low reproductive rates, and reach maturity at a much slower pace
- Sawfish primarily inhabit shallow waters, typically found at depths ranging from 0 to 10 meters
- Juveniles prefer critical habitats such as shallow intertidal and subtidal benthic habitat, estuaries, mangroves, seagrass etc.
- Human activities, specifically the construction of large jetties with piles, a rock wall harbor, and dredged shipping lanes etc. adversely affect nursery use and movement of sawfish in the coastal waters
- Mangrove afforestation, dredging and deepening of coastal areas invites larger predator from deeper water

CMFRI has successfully completed a dedicated project focused on protected elasmobranch species including sawfish under the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972. This project aimed to evaluate and assess the historical and current status of these species, while also developing strategies for their management and conservation.

If you encounter sawfish, please contact : State Forest & Wildlife Department, State Fisheries Department, ICAR-CMFRI

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