

Illustrating Protection: A Field Guide to India's Protected Sharks and Rays

Ornate Eagle Ray
(*Aetomylæus vespertilio*)



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India has a long and evolving history of safeguarding its wildlife through the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (WPA) - the country's foremost legal instrument for the protection of both terrestrial and marine fauna. Over the decades, this Act has stood as a pillar of conservation, adapting to meet new ecological challenges and expanding its scope to include vulnerable marine species such as sharks and rays. The inclusion of sharks and rays in earlier amendments reflects that India has long recognized the need to protect these ancient and ecologically vital species. Building on this strong foundation, the Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2022 (WPAA) marked a significant stride forward. The amendment strengthens wildlife protection in India by enhancing species classification, enforcement mechanisms, and alignment with international agreements such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Under the amended Act, species listed in Appendix II of the CITES also finds a place in the national schedules, ensuring that India's marine conservation framework resonates with global wildlife protection standards.

The WPAA came into force on 1 April 2023, mandating the highest level of protection and stricter regulation of trade for marine species. Following the WPAA, the list of protected sharks and rays in India has expanded significantly. While this marks a crucial step for marine biodiversity conservation, it also brings forth an immediate need to build awareness among officials, enforcement agencies, and fishers about the provisions of the amended Act. Strengthening their ability to identify trade-regulated and protected species in the field is essential to ensure that the law's intent translates into effective on-ground conservation. In response to this need, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research - Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (ICAR-CMFRI) — the designated CITES Scientific Authority in India for marine species and trade regulation — undertook the task of developing a practical tool that bridges science and enforcement. The result is the 'Illustrated Guide to Protected Elasmobranchs in Indian Waters - With WPAA, IUCN, CITES & NDF Status', published in 2025 as part of the ICAR-CMFRI Elasmobranch Project (FFD/ELM/07).

This guide brings together vital conservation information in one accessible source. Featuring 34 meticulously illustrated species, it presents each with its corresponding protection status under the WPAA, listing in CITES Appendices, IUCN Red List of Threatened Species category, and Non-Detriment Findings (NDF) status. Besides the illustrations, the guide also provides quick-reference explanations at the back pages, outlining what each WPAA schedule, CITES Appendix, IUCN category, and NDF assessment represents. This offers readers a comprehensive understanding of global and national conservation priorities, reinforcing the connection between legislative protection and international commitments to marine biodiversity conservation. Designed with clarity and precision, the illustrations enable easy and accurate identification, an indispensable aid for fisheries managers, customs officers, and enforcement staff working to curb illegal trade. At the same time, the guide serves as an educational resource for students and researchers, enhancing understanding of India's evolving legal and ecological frameworks for shark and ray conservation.

By uniting multiple conservation indicators- national, international, and scientific- within a single format, this publication represents a vital step toward informed decision-making and effective enforcement. It embodies how science communication can empower governance and strengthen India's ongoing commitment to sustainable and lawful marine resource management. The Illustrated Guide to Protected Elasmobranchs in Indian Waters is freely available online via the CITES website and the ICAR-CMFRI digital repository:

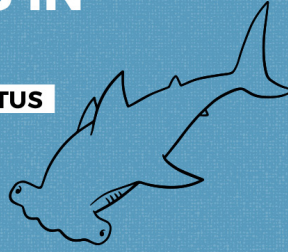
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ILLUSTRATED GUIDE TO PROTECTED ELASMOBRANCHS IN INDIAN WATERS

WITH WPAA, IUCN, CITES & NDF STATUS

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Carcharhinus longimanus Oceanic Whitetip Shark



WPAA (2022) Status
Schedule II & Schedule IV



IUCN Status
Critically Endangered



CITES Status
Appendix II



NDF

NDF Advisory for India
Positive (Period 2017-2022)
Present NDF Advisory (2023 Onwards)
Negative

Remarks
Protected under Wild life
(Protection) Amendment
Act, 2022

10

Mobula spp.



WPAA (2022) Status
Schedule IV



CITES Status
Appendix II



IUCN Status

Mobula mobular
Endangered

Mobula birostris
Endangered

Mobula thurstoni
Endangered

Mobula kuhlii
Endangered

Mobula eregoodoo
Endangered

Mobula tarapacana
Endangered

Mobula alfredi
Vulnerable



NDF

NDF Advisory for India
Positive with Conditions (Period 2022-2024)
Present NDF Advisory (2023 Onwards)
Negative

Remarks
Protected under Wild life
(Protection) Amendment
Act, 2022

25

Pristis pristis Common Sawfish



WPAA (2022) Status
Schedule I & Schedule IV



IUCN Status
Critically Endangered



CITES Status
Appendix I



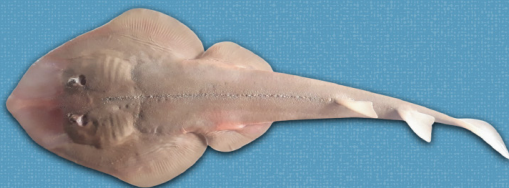
NDF

NDF Advisory for India
Not Required

Remarks
Protected under Wild life
(Protection) Amendment Act, 2022
Included in CITES Appendix I

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Glaucostegus obtusus Widenose Guitarfish



WPAA (2022) Status
Schedule I & Schedule IV



IUCN Status
Critically Endangered



CITES Status
Appendix II



NDF

NDF Advisory for India
Not Applicable

Remarks
Protected under Wild life
(Protection) Amendment
Act, 2022

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Rhina ancylostomus Bowmouth Guitarfish



WPAA (2022) Status
Schedule I & Schedule IV



IUCN Status
Critically Endangered



CITES Status
Appendix II



NDF

NDF Advisory for India
Negative (Period 2022-2026)
Present NDF Advisory (2023 Onwards)
Negative

Remarks
Protected under Wild life
(Protection) Amendment
Act, 2022

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