

# Cownose Ray

*Rhinoptera bonasus*

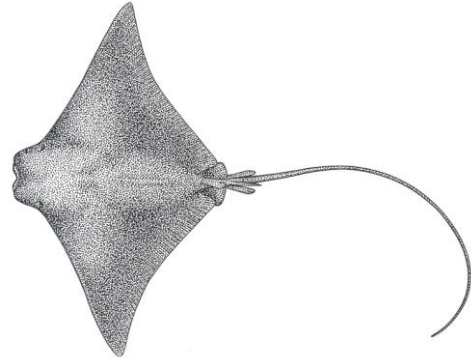


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**Relatives:** Class: Chondrichthyes – cartilaginous fishes

Order: Myliobatiformes

Family: Myliobatidae - includes spotted eagle, bullnose and southern eagle rays

The cownose ray is in the subclass Elasmobranchii with sharks, skates and rays. The cownose ray is further grouped into the Batoid Fishes (Batoidea), which include skates, rays, guitarfishes and sawfishes. These fish share the characteristics of having a dorsoventrally flattened body, eyes located on the top of the head, flattened teeth to crush prey, 5 paired gill slits on the underside of the body and broadly expanded pectoral fins that look similar to wings.

**Description:** The cownose ray has a brown to gray body color. The wings are long and pointed. There is a keratin barb with a venomous spine halfway down the tail.

**Size:** Adults will reach 4 ft (48 inches) across the pectoral wings and weigh 25-70lbs (11-31kg).

**Habitat:**

**Range:** New England to the South Caribbean, western Africa, and throughout the Gulf of Mexico, migrating to Trinidad, Venezuela, and Brazil.

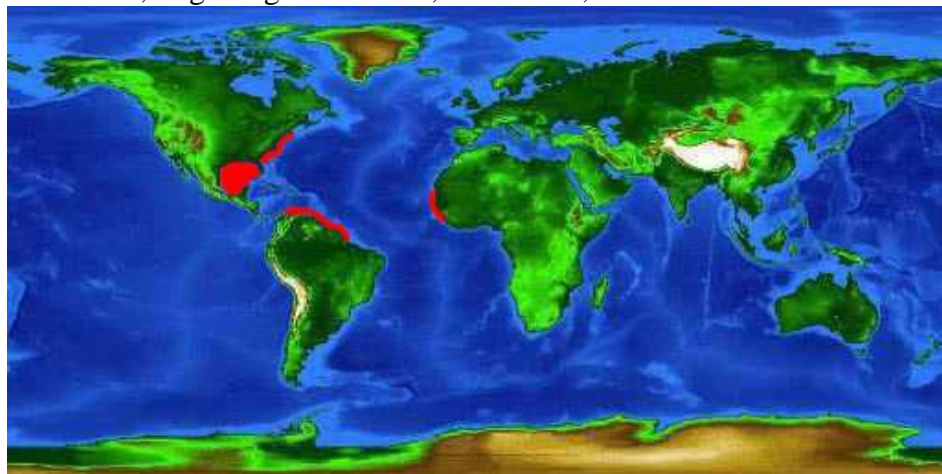


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<b>Predators:</b>	Sandbar shark, cobia, and bull shark.
<b>Diet/Prey:</b>	The cownose ray will feed mainly on bottom dwelling mollusks, and crustaceans.  They will dig pits in the bottom, suck sediment in through their mouth, spitting it out of their spiracles, searching for food.
<b>Aquarium Diet:</b>	They are fed a variety of seafood including smelt, squid, shrimp, capelin, clam, and krill.
<b>Reproduction:</b>	Reproductive development is ovoviviparous (eggs in the uterus and hatch internally). Cownose rays usually produce one pup per pregnancy.
<b>Fun Facts:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Form segregated schools; juveniles group according to size with both males and females; adults group according to sex</li> <li>• Have occasionally been seen jumping out of the water; believed to be a territorial display</li> <li>• Differ from eagle and bullnose rays by the shape of the snout</li> <li>• Season mass migrations of cownose ray are believed to be coupled with changes in water temperature and sun orientation—in the Atlantic, rays move southward in late fall and northward in late spring</li> <li>• Lifespan is estimated between 13-18 years</li> </ul>
<b>Conservation Connection:</b>	<p>The cownose ray population is believed to be increasing in number.</p> <p>There has been concern about the increasing population size of cownose rays due to their high predation of oyster beds. The oyster population has been decreasing due to diseases and pollution reducing their grass bed habitat. It is thought that the cownose ray's high predation of oyster beds could further complicate the problem of declining oyster populations.</p> <p>According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), the cownose ray is not listed as endangered or vulnerable. The IUCN consists of a global union of state, governmental agencies, and non-governmental organizations in partnership whose goal is to assess the conservation status of different species.</p>
<b>Status in SC:</b>	Common
<b>Aliases:</b>	N/A
<b>References:</b>	Bachleda, F. Lynne. <u>Dangerous Wildlife in the Southeast</u> . Menasha Ridge Press. South Korea, 2001.

Farmer III, Charles H. Sharks of South Carolina. South Carolina Department of Natural Resources Marine Resources Division. Charleston, South Carolina, 2004.

Kittle, Kimberly. "Biological Profiles: Cownose Ray." Florida Museum of Natural History.  
<http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/fish/Gallery/Descript/CownoseRay/CownoseRay.html>