Shark Conservation Fund

Shark, skate and chimaera Eggcases

Unlike most fishes, which release their eggs and sperm into the open ocean and leave the rest to chance, sharks and their relatives have 'internal fertilisation', which gives their young a much better chance at survival.

Some sharks and many rays give birth to live young (called pups). But in some sharks and all skates and chimaeras, the females produce protective eggcases, also called mermaids' purses, and attach them to the seabed, or leave them on the seafloor. The pups develop inside these eggcases, then hatch and swim away.

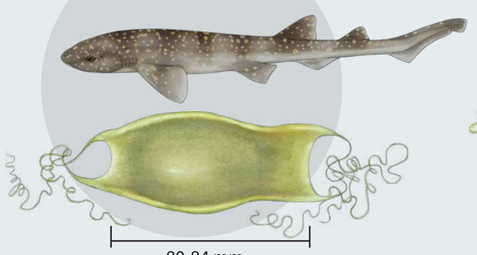
By looking at the size, shape and texture of an eggcase, you can work out which species of shark, skate or chimaera produced it!

The measurement provided for each eggcase is the straight-line distance along the longest part of the capsule (excluding horns/ tendrils), once it has been rehydrated.

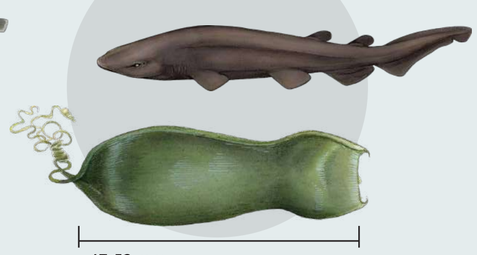
SHARKS

Of the 55 species of shark found in Namibian waters, just a few species produce eggcases. They look quite different to the eggcases produced by skates and chimaeras. Shark eggcases have long, curly fibres called tendrils, at each corner which are used to attach the eggcase to structures underwater and keep it from being swept away.

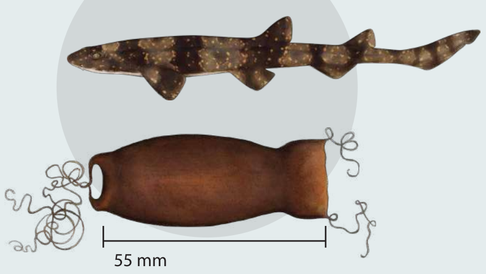
Scyliorhinus capensis
Yellowspotted catshark



Apristurus microps
Smalleyed catshark

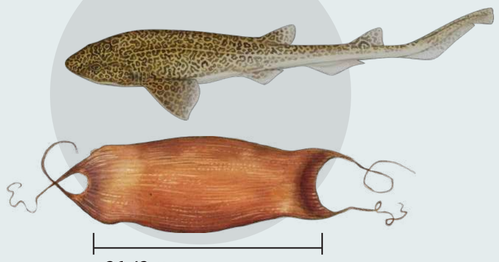


Haploblepharus pictus
Dark shyshark



Apristurus melanoasper
Fleshynose catshark

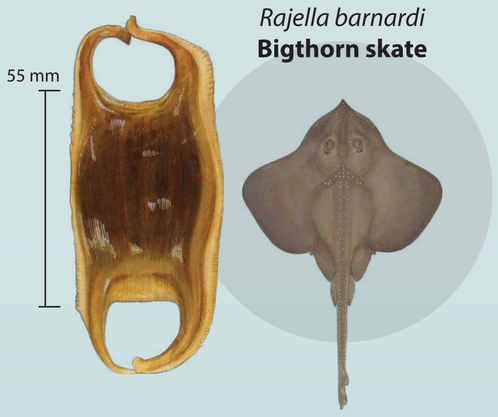
Holohalaelurus regani
Izak catshark



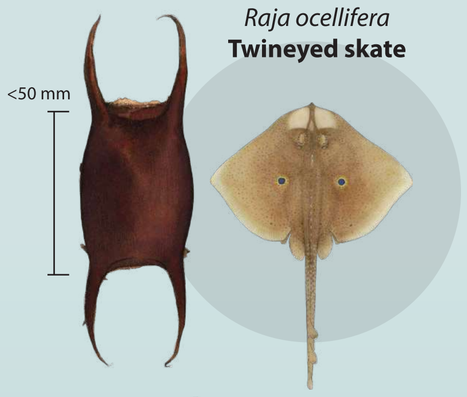
SKATES

Skates are related to sharks, but have flattened bodies and live on or close to the seafloor. All skates produce eggcases, and there are 25 species of skate known to inhabit Namibian waters. Some live close to the coast, whilst other species live in deep waters far from shore and are very rarely seen. For this reason, we don't know what the eggcases of many deepwater skate species look like as they have never been recorded by scientists!

Rajella barnardi
Bigthorn skate



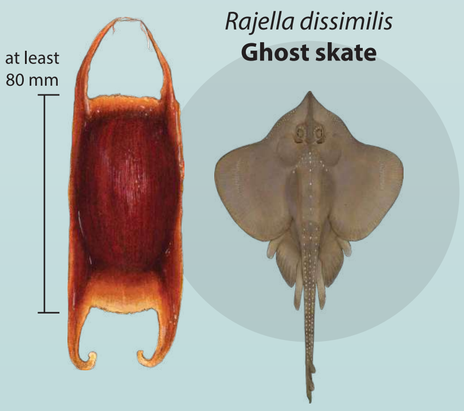
Raja ocellifera
Twineyed skate



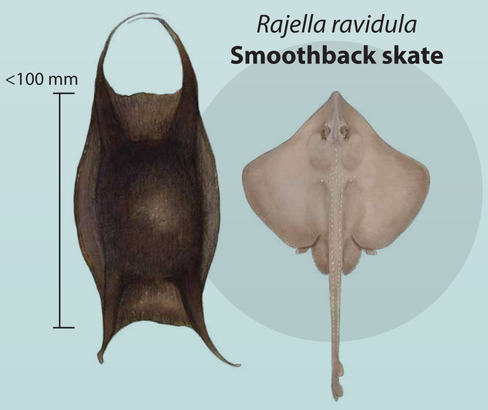
Bathyraja smithii
African softnosed skate

Rostroraja alba
Spearnose skate

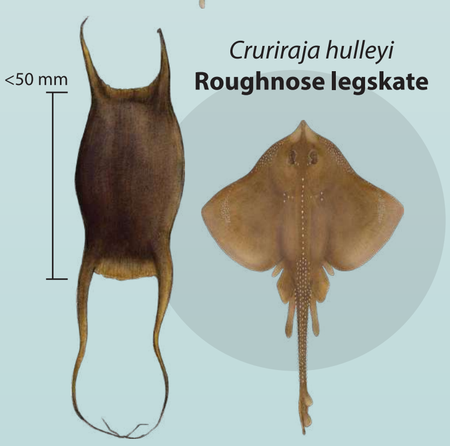
Rajella dissimilis
Ghost skate



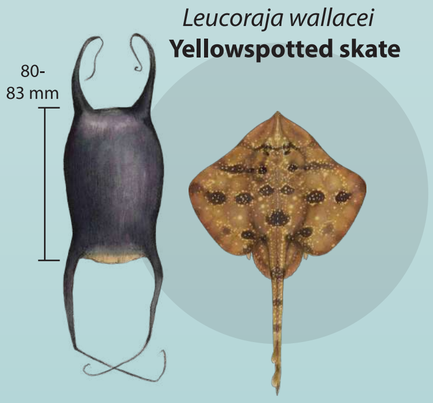
Rajella ravidula
Smoothback skate



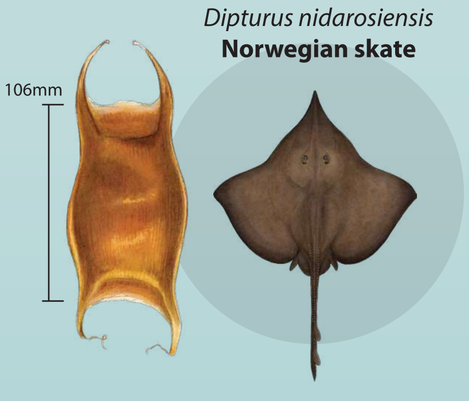
Cruriraja hulleyi
Roughnose legskate



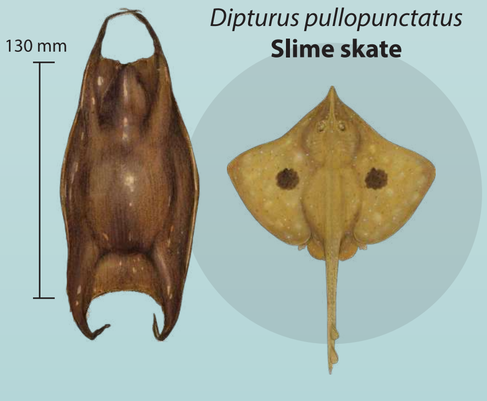
Leucoraja wallacei
Yellowspotted skate



Dipturus nidarosiensis
Norwegian skate

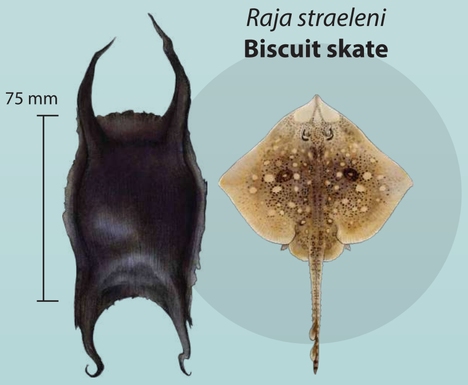


Dipturus pullopunctatus
Slime skate



Rajella leoparda
Leopard skate

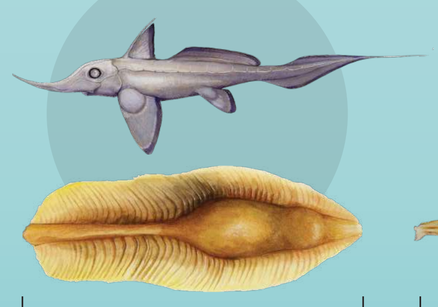
Raja straeleni
Biscuit skate



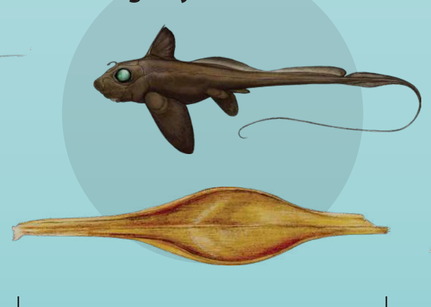
CHIMAERAS

Most chimaeras live in the very deep ocean, at depths ranging between 200 m and over 2,000 m.
All chimaeras produce eggcases. There is a lot we don't know about these mysterious creatures, sometimes called 'ghost sharks'. There are 8 chimaera species present in Namibian waters, but we only know what the eggcases of 4 of those species look like.

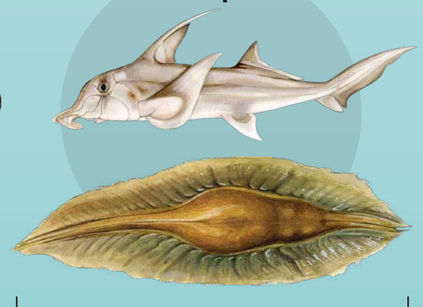
Harriotta raleighana
Narrownose chimaera



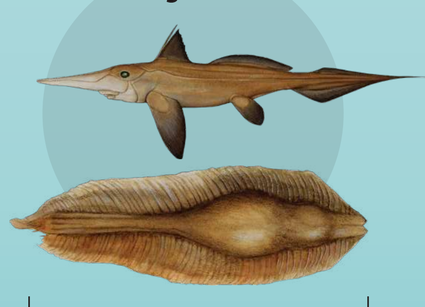
Hydrolagus mirabilis
Large-eyed chimaera



Callorhinchus capensis
St. Joseph shark



Rhinochimaera atlantica
Atlantic longnose chimaera



At least 88 species of sharks, skates, rays and chimaeras live in the ocean off Namibia's coast, and 30 of those species produce eggcases. But for some of the rare species and those that live in the deep sea, we have never seen what their eggcases look like. This poster shows the size, shape and structure of eggcases for all the species we have that information for. But there is lots still to learn about sharks, skates, rays and chimaeras in Namibia's waters.

If you are lucky enough to live near the sea and want to go in search of mermaids' purses yourself, look at the high tide line, where bands of seaweed have been left by the tide - that's where you can usually find them. Soak them in water for several hours, then measure them and try to identify which species they came from!

Illustrations by Alexis Aronson. Text by Ruth H. Leeney