

Skate
Species
Identification



NMFS, NEFSC

May 1, 2000

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NMFS- NEFSC

- This educational field guide will help you distinguish the taxonomic characteristics that are distinct to each species of skate.
- **Please note:** If there are no dorsal fins on the tail of your sample or it contains one or more spines (stingers) please refer to rays in Bigelow and Schroeder.

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Winter Skate:

Leucoraja ocellata

- AKA: Big Skate, Spotted Skate and Eyed Skate
- Range off Newfoundland to North Carolina
- Max size = 43 in (109 cm)
- In males (35-50 cm) claspers barely (if at all) reach edge of posterior disk
- In females (35-50 cm) no patch of spines on sides of vent
- Two rows of spines on either side of the midline on tail

**Sorry,
no picture
available.**

Little Skate:

Leucoraja erinacea

- AKA: Summer Skate, Common Skate
- Range from St. Lawrence to Virginia
- Max size = 21in (54 cm)
- In males (35-50 cm) claspers extend well beyond posterior edge of disk
- In female (35-50 cm) patches of spines located on both sides of vent
- Two rows of spines on either side of the midline on tail



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Barndoor Skate:

Dipturus laevis

- Range off Newfoundland to North Carolina
- Max size = 5 ft (152 cm)
- Very pointed snout
- Small thorn-like spines down mid-line of back and tail.
- Two rows of thorn like spines on either side of the midline on tail
- Distinct ventral gray coloration



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Thorny Skate:

Amblyraja radiata

- AKA: Starry Skate
- Range from west of Greenland to South Carolina greater than 10 fathoms
- Max size = 40 in (102 cm)
- Midline of back and tail armed with “large conspicuous thorns” not more than 19



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Smooth Skate:

Malacoraja senta

- AKA: Prickly Skate, Smooth Tailed Skate
- Range from off Newfoundland to South Carolina 40-50 fms
- Max size = 24 in (61 cm)
- Snout pointed
- Many very small thorns cover approximately half of the tail



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Clearnose Skate:

Raja eglanteria

- AKA: Brier Skate
- Range from Massachusetts to Florida
- Max size = 37 in (94 cm)
- Translucent space on each side of snout
- One line of thorns that run down the mid-line of back
- Spots and bars mark dorsal side
- Definite space between two dorsal fins on tail



Figure 1. Example page for clearnose skate from the NEFSC skate identification guide.

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Rosette Skate:

Leucoraja garmani

- AKA: Leopard Skate
- Range from Nantucket, MA to Florida 30-300 fathoms
- Max size = 16 in (41cm)
- Dark rosettes (six or more dark spots surrounding a central point) on back

