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To swim, some stingrays move their whole bodies in a wavy motion that propels them through the water. Other species flap their fins like bird wings and "fly" through the water.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BRIAN SKERRY

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## Stingray

Stingrays, with their wide, flat bodies, may not look like fish, but they are. They are related to sharks, and like their shark cousins, they do not have bones. Instead, their bodies are supported by cartilage—the same material that you feel inside the tip of your nose.

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**COMMON NAME:** Stingrays

**SCIENTIFIC NAME:** *Myliobatoidei*

**TYPE:** Fish

**DIET:** Carnivore

**AVERAGE LIFE SPAN IN THE WILD:** 15 to 25 years

**SIZE:** Up to 6.5 feet

**WEIGHT:** Up to 790 pounds



Stingrays have broad fins that run the full length of their bodies, giving them a flat, roundish shape. To swim, some stingrays move their whole bodies in a wavy motion that propels them through the water. Other species flap their fins like bird wings and "fly" through the water.

Stingrays have tails that are armed for defense. Some kinds of stingrays have a spine in their tail with a very sharp point and edges that are serrated or notched.

Many species, including the exotic-looking blue-spotted stingray, have venom that is delivered through their tails. That venom, and the spine itself, can be dangerous to humans. Stingrays prefer shallow, near-shore waters in warm parts of the world. Here, they spend most of their time lying partially buried on the ocean floor hiding from predators, like sharks, or waiting for prey to swim by. Their colors usually match the mud or sand they hide in. While a stingray's mouth is on the underside of its body, along with its nostrils and gill slits, its eyes are on the top. Scientists don't think they use their eyes for hunting very much though. Instead, they use special sensors called ampullae of Lorenzini, which can detect the tiny electrical charges emitted by their prey.



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Prey for stingrays includes clams, oysters, shrimps, crabs, and mussels. When they find dinner, stingrays crush their meal using strong jaws. Generally, female stingrays give birth once a year. They usually have two to six young at a time. While a baby stingray is still inside its mother, it grows to be quite large and developed so that when it's born, it looks like a little adult. From birth, the young stingray is able to fend for itself.

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