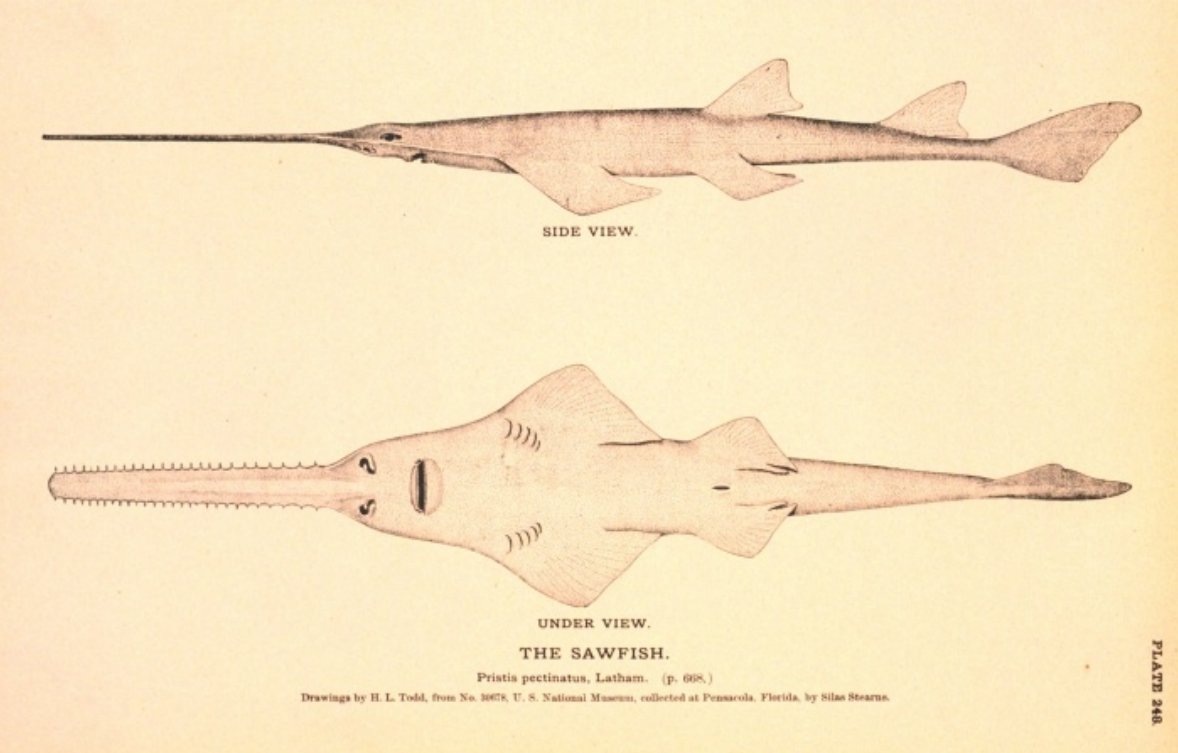
Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

SAWFISH SAW Z146



Sawfish are a family of rays, characterized by a long, toothy nose extension snout. Several species can grow to approximately 7 metres. The family as a whole is largely unknown and little studied. They are members of the family Pristidae within the order Pristiformes, from the Ancient Greek *pristēs* meaning "a sawyer" or "a saw". The lifespan is around 25 to 30 years.

The saw grows from the head of the sawfish, and gives it its name. It is incredibly sensitive and allows the sawfish to detect movement and even heartbeats of buried prey in the ocean floor. The "teeth" protruding from the saw are not real teeth, but modified structures called denticles.

Sawfish are found in tropical and sub-tropical areas in the Atlantic and Indo-Pacific. They inhabit coastal areas such as bays and estuaries and live in shallow, muddy water. All sawfish have the ability to traverse between fresh and saltwater. Sawfish are nocturnal, usually sleeping during the day and hunting at night. Despite a fearsome appearance, they do not attack people unless provoked or surprised. All species of sawfish are endangered and capturing sawfish is illegal in the USA and Australia.

Reading Borough Council
Heritage Lottery Fund