

Himantura schmardae (Caribbean Whiptail Stingray)

Family: Dasyatidae (Stingrays)

Order: Rajiformes (Rays and Sawfish)

Class: Chondrichthyes (Cartilaginous Fish)

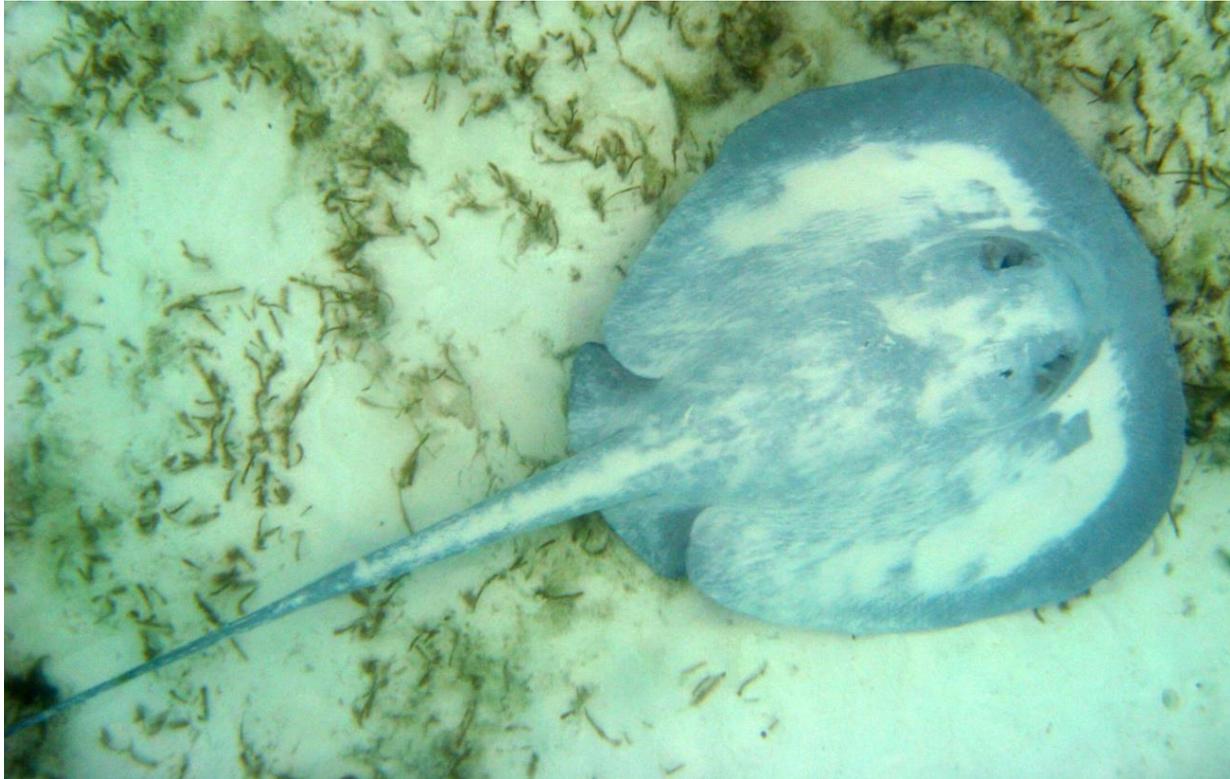


Fig.1. Caribbean whiptail stingray, *Himantura schmardae*.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chupare_stingray, downloaded 20 October 2016]

TRAITS. *Himantura schmardae*, also known as Caribbean whiptail stingray or chupare stingray (Wikipedia, 2016), is usually a sooty olive, brown or grey colour on its dorsal side and yellowish to off-white colour on its ventral side (UNISANTA, 2016). It has a maximum disc width of 200cm (Wikipedia, 2016), making it one of the largest species of stingray. Ovate in shape with a slender tail much longer than the width of its disc (Fig. 1), the tail contains a spine about half its length, which is serrated and poisonous. The top side of the broad disc has eyes and a snout that barely projects, and at the bottom, has a mouth slightly arching with 28-36 rows of teeth that are flat or rounded and arranged in the upper jaw. At the lower center section of the mouth are five papillae, which are nipple-like projections containing taste buds, in a horizontal line. The edges of the disc are broadly rounded without any dorsal or caudal fins, though it contains pelvic fins whose margin extends straight at the front and curved at the back, but does not extend further than the outline of the disc (UNISANTA, 2016).

DISTRIBUTION. *Himantura schmardae* can be found at the sandy bottoms of the Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea; covering the Greater and Lesser Antilles,

including Brazil (Fig. 2). It can sometimes be found close to coral reefs (NWE, 2016), such as the Buccoo Reef in Tobago.

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY. They usually inhabit the shallow waters close to shorelines. In mangrove filled lagoons in Venezuela the chupare stingray can be found in abundance (UNISANTA, 2016). Their relatively thin bodies allow them to lay low in the sand and hide from their prey. They have a strong sense of smell which aids in locating prey and makes them easy to catch. Their mouths are even powerful enough to crush the shells of other organisms. Stingrays occasionally feed on small fish, but their main diet consists of molluscs such as snails, squids and clams; and crustaceans such as shrimp, crabs and barnacles, making corals reefs a favourite ground to feed (NWE, 2016). Population size, growth patterns and trends are still unknown (IUCN, 2016).

REPRODUCTION. During the mating season, the male trails and courts the female and nibbles at her pectoral disc. After some time, the male then mounts onto the female, placing one clasper into the female's vent. Stingrays are ovoviviparous, and produce 5-10 live young. The female carries them in her womb, although she does not have a placenta. The embryos obtain their nutrients from their yolk sac, and when the sac becomes depleted, uterine milk is then supplied by the mother to her young (NWE, 2016).

BEHAVIOUR. Stingrays do not usually attack humans when they are around. Their natural instinct is to swim away when a threat has been detected. However, if they are stepped on or attacked, they will whip their tail and sting their predator. If stepped on, the sting will usually occur in the foot. As for other body parts, sufferers can be affected by poisoning, pain, severed arteries, etc., which can possible lead to a fatality, as the sting is poisonous. As for predators like sharks, whipping has proven ineffective the majority of the time. The stinger being broken is not fatal to the stingray because in time it will be regrown (NWE, 2016).

APPLIED BIOLOGY. This species is not currently under any threat, but more research needs to be done on it (IUCN, 2016).

REFERENCES

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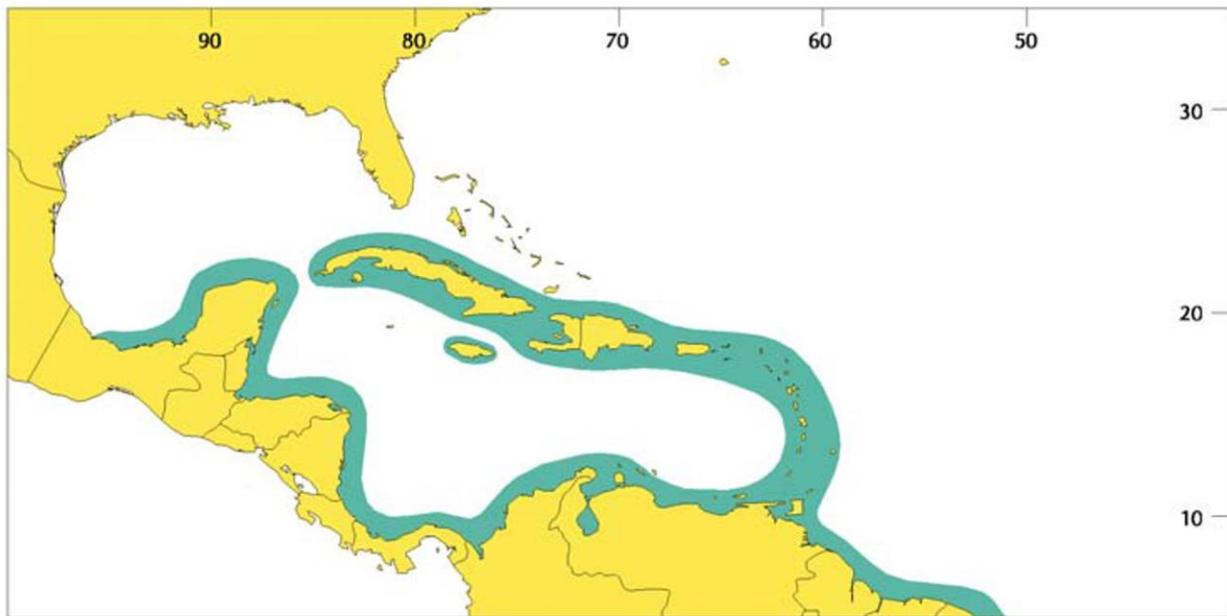


Fig. 2. Caribbean whiptail stingray geographic distribution.

[<http://sites.unisanta.br/simposiobiomar/2007/downloads/material/BATOIDS-McEachran-deCarvalho.pdf>,
downloaded 23 October 2016]

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