

## Spotted Eagle Rays

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Spotted eagle rays, those graceful creatures boaters often see breaching the surface and gliding across the shallows, are not just a single species, as previously thought. Research led by Nova Southeastern University professor Mahmood Shivji shows that there are at least two species -- possibly more -- of the black rays with white spots.

The finding by Shivji and colleagues at the Guy Harvey Research Institute and National Coral Reef Institute has significant ecological implications because spotted eagle rays are heavily fished in some parts of the world, especially Southeast Asia. The more species and subspecies of animals, the smaller their distribution and population size, which makes them more vulnerable to fishing pressure.

In-depth genetic analysis of eagle rays found they originated in the Indo West-Pacific, and moved into the Atlantic and eastern Pacific. Over time, they have evolved into different species that do not mix. The spotted eagle rays found in South Florida are genetically distinct from those in the Pacific.