

Family 2.—*RAIDÆ*—The Ray Family.Genus 1.—*Raia*.Species 1.—*Raia lævis*—The Skate.

This fish is known on the North American coast, as the smooth backed skate, and is found from 2 to 4 feet in length. It is of square form; the body smooth, elevated in the centre; of a uniform light brown colour above; the tail long and slender, longer than the body, with three rows of spines.

The peculiar form of the skate adapts it admirably to exist near the bottom, and it may with more propriety be called a flat-fish, than any of the flounder family. Its mode of progression is not very easily described; when the fish is not alarmed, it is performed with a slight undulating motion of its pectoral fins, something between flying and swimming. When a skate is making its way to seize food, or to escape from an enemy, great muscular exertion is evident.

The young are produced in the latter part of spring, or during summer. They are deposited by the parent fish in thin horny cases, in form nearly square; these are often found along the coast, and being empty, are jocularly termed "sailors' purses."

As food, the skate is held in very different degrees of estimation in different places. In London, large quantities are consumed, and the flesh is considered delicate and well flavoured; but on some parts of the English coast, although caught in considerable numbers, the flesh is seldom eaten, and is used for baiting lobster-pots. The French are great consumers of skate; and its flesh is used extensively both at New York and Boston; by many it is deemed a great delicacy. After the fish is skinned, the fleshy part of the huge pectoral fins, which is beautifully white, is cut into long, thin slips, about an inch wide; these are rolled like ribbon, and dressed in that form.

The skate is found everywhere on the coasts of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, and is frequently taken of large size, with hook and line, by cod fishers. The writer, while haddock fishing, in June 1848, in the Basin of Annapolis, saw two fine skate caught at once, each 30 inches over, which were in prime condition. In August 1850, while pollack fishing in 26 fathoms water off the eastern end of Campo Bello, near Head Harbour Light House, a skate was taken 3 feet over, weighing full 60lbs. It was not in good condition, having probably spawned; from the difficulty in bringing it to the surface, for the skate is exceedingly violent when hooked, it was supposed to be a halibut.

Dr. Storer states, that skate are sometimes met with near Boston, weighing 200lbs., and in his Report, he describes a male specimen sent to him from New Bedford, 54 inches long, and 36 inches wide.