RIVER *recluses*

fast facts

NAME: Speartooth shark *(Glyphis glyphis)* **Length:** 2 metres **Population:** Unknown. Critically Endangered in Australia
Features: Grey upper surface and pale underneath, short snouts and triangular teeth.

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NAME: Freshwater sawfish *(Pristis microdon)* **Length:** 6 metres **Population:** Unknown. Vulnerable in Australia
Features: Long rostrum, shark like body, yellowish to grey upper side and pale underside.

Freshwater sawfish

Like something out of the pages of a science-fiction book, the Freshwater sawfish looks like the result of a mad scientist's experiment. It can grow up to an impressive six metres long. However, even though their pointed fins are very shark-like, the Freshwater sawfish is in fact a member of the ray family.

Of course the most prominent feature of the Freshwater sawfish is its unworldly chainsaw-like appendage which is called a rostrum. The rostrum has an average of twenty evenly-spaced teeth on each side, starting at its base.

Despite first assumptions, the Freshwater sawfish does not use its 'saw' to cut up its food. Rather it is used as a tool to stun schooling fish and sift through riverbed sediment to find buried invertebrates. The sawfish likes to munch on various types of fish including catfish as well as crustaceans and molluscs.

The very elusive nature of the Freshwater sawfish has caused great speculation about its distribution over the world. Its conservation status is listed as Vulnerable in Australia, due to fishing pressure for its flesh and fins. It is also thought to exist in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, South Africa, Sri Lanka and India.

They prefer the fresh or slightly saline waters of rivers and estuaries and have been known to live up to 100 kilometres from the sea. They avoid the vegetation along the river banks, favouring turbid waters over soft muddy river beds.

Freshwater shark

Also known as the Speartooth shark for its serrated triangular teeth, the Freshwater shark is a shy species that is custom built for the murky rivers it calls home.

They have a very plain colour pattern, with a grey upper surface, a pale underneath and an inconspicuous pale stripe along its side. While this colouring may seem dull, it is usually acting as a very effective camouflage technique called countershading. From above, the shark is indistinguishable from the dark river bed, while from below it blends in with the light backdrop of the surface.

Speartooth sharks have a sixth sense for finding food. Using a high number of electromagnetic receptors called ampullae under its short rounded snout, these sharks can detect electromagnetic currents emitted by creatures that have buried themselves in the muddy river bed.

This species was thought to be exclusive to the northern coast of Australia but it has allegedly been sighted in Papua New Guinea. The Speartooth shark primarily lives in tidal rivers and estuaries of tropical waters preferring slightly saline freshwater. It has a conservation status of Critically Endangered in Australia, due to recreational fishing, gill netting and degradation of their habitats.

Little is known about the diet of the Speartooth shark but one study revealed that they do feed on long-arm prawns, burrowing gobies, gudgeons, benthic-feeding jewfish and bony bream.