

Sawfishes are large rays historically found in over 70 tropical and sub-tropical countries. Due to incidental and directed capture in fisheries and loss of critical habitats, sawfish populations have declined dramatically in the last 2-3 decades. Both species encountered in Panama are now Critically Endangered to extinction.

Since 2016 MarAlliance has been carrying out a national assessment of sawfish in Panama to fill gaps in our knowledge of their historical and current populations. Through social surveys with artisanal fishers, sawfish rostra sampling, and the collection of water samples for environmental DNA analysis, we now have a better understanding of the status of sawfish in Panama and priorities for their conservation.

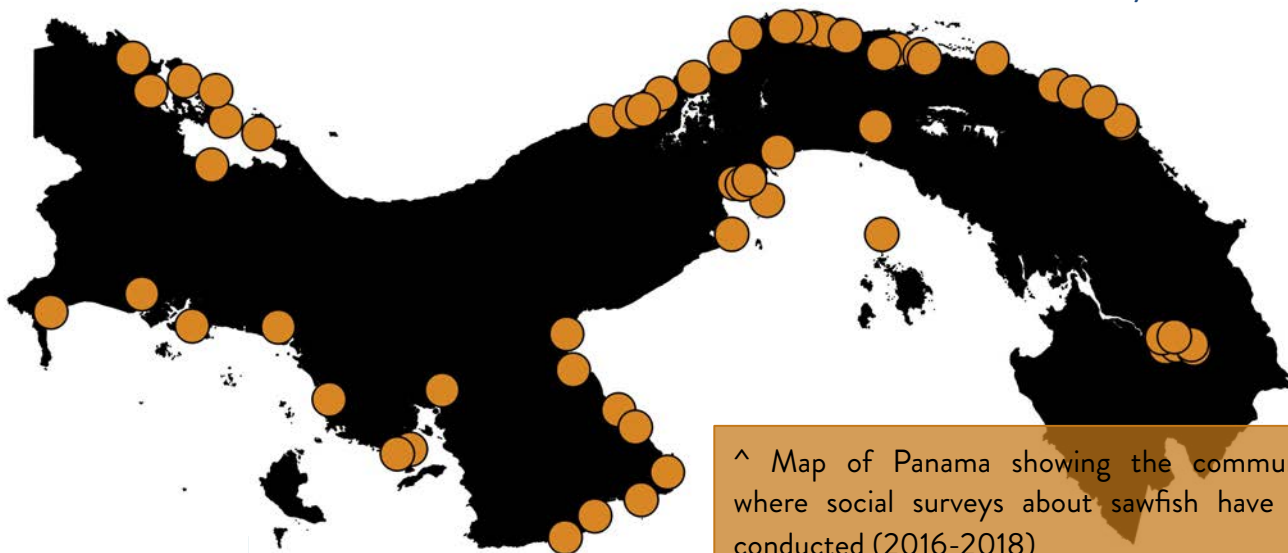


 **197** surveys conducted in **66** communities

 **37**

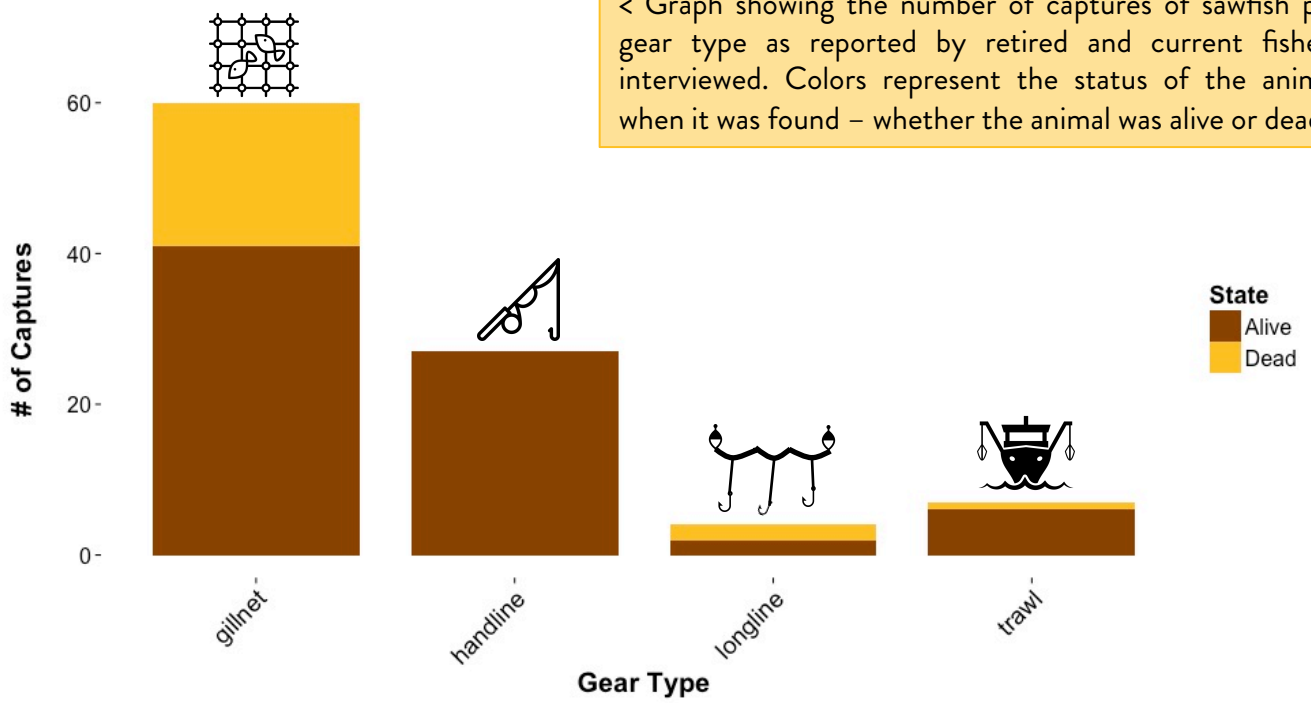
 **19** sawfish rostra measured and sampled from 2 species

encounters reported by fishers and divers in the last 5 years

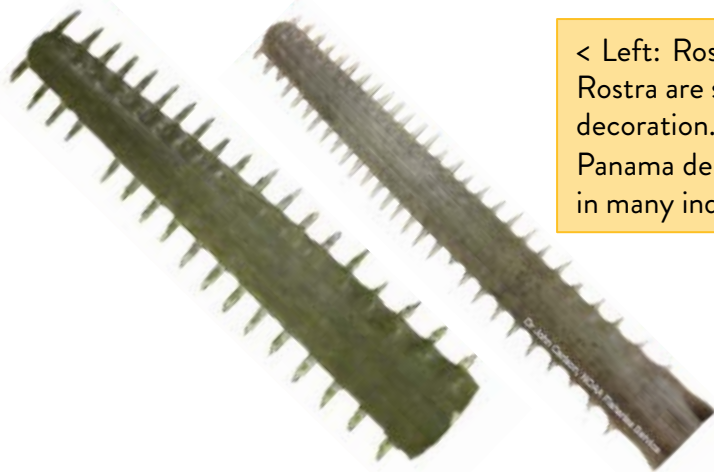


^ Map of Panama showing the communities where social surveys about sawfish have been conducted (2016-2018)

< Graph showing the number of captures of sawfish per gear type as reported by retired and current fishers interviewed. Colors represent the status of the animal when it was found – whether the animal was alive or dead.



Sixty percent of reported sawfish captures occurred with gillnets, followed by handline, trawling nets, and longline. Surprisingly, the majority of sawfish captured in gillnets were still alive when the fisher discovered them. This information has important conservation implications for sawfish.



< Left: Rostra of largetooth (left) and smalltooth (right) sawfish. Rostra are sometimes kept after the animal is captured and used as decoration. Below: Pre-Colombian urn discovered in Central Panama depicting a sawfish. Sawfish have held cultural significance in many indigenous cultures of Panama.



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Panama may be one of the last locations in the region with remaining sawfish. Any sighting or capture information on these species in Panama is extremely helpful for us to better understand their distribution in the country and direct conservation efforts. If you have information on a sawfish sighting or capture, or have a sawfish saw that we can sample, you can help our efforts by contacting us at info@maralliance.org.



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