



Duane Raver

STINGAREE

by
Jerald Horst

Four species of stingrays live in coastal Louisiana waters. Stingrays have the well-founded reputation for inflicting painful and slow-to-heal wounds with their bonelike barb or barbs (some have more than one). Shrimpers must deal with them when they sort their catch. Hook-and-line fishermen often hook or snag them, and surf fishermen run the risk of stepping on them.

It is simpler and safer to cut the line rather than to try to unhook a stingray. This may be hard to swallow if you snag one with a \$5 bottom-running lure. Stingrays should always be dealt with carefully. Surf fishermen can avoid stepping on one by shuffling their feet rather than taking steps. Usually when nudged by a human foot, a stingray will skitter away. Stepping on one pins it to the bottom, and the animal will lash its barbed tail in defense. Surf fishermen run the most risk in August and September when female stingrays move into shallow water to bear their young.

A stingray barb has dozens of curved serrations on its edges and is covered by a sheath containing venom glands. The slightest cut on a human can cause the affected area and lymph nodes to swell. The extreme pain alone can send the victim into shock.

First aid measures include letting the wound bleed for a few moments to flush out some of the poison. The wound should be thoroughly cleaned and put in water as hot as the person can stand for 30 minutes. Research has shown that stingray venom is very sensitive to heat and breaks down after 15 minutes of soaking. A mild antiseptic should then be applied and the victim should see a doctor.