

What's behind the name of some fishes?

Stéphan G. Reeb
 Université de Moncton, Canada
 2007

| Name | Latin name | Reason | Comment |
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| Angelsharks | Family Squatinidae | Name does not refer to their behaviour, but to their shape: flat body with huge pectoral fins looks like angel when seen from above | One (and only one) of these species is not called angelshark, but "sand devil" instead. Its ashy-grey colour makes it a dark angel. |
| Sawfishes | Family Pristidae | Long, flat, blade-like snout | There are also sawsharks (family Pristiophoridae) named for the same reason |
| Guitarfishes | Family Rhinobatidae | Dorsoventrally flattened head gives whole body a guitar shape | Other family members are called shovelnose rays |
| Plownose, Spookfishes, Elephantfishes | Order Chimaeriformes (chimeras) | Hoe or paddle or trunk-shaped snout used in sensory perception | Elephantfishes is a name also used for the unrelated Mormyridae |
| Elephantfishes | Family Mormyridae | Many species have a long, down-curved snout | |
| Lungfishes | Families Protopteridae and Ceratodontidae | Possess lung(s) | |
| Flagfins | Another name for the bichirs (genus Polypterus) | Dorsal finlets have vertical spine to which horizontal rays are attached, like a flagpole. | |
| Paddlefishes | Family Poliodontidae | Very long and flattened snout, used in sensory perception, probably electroreception | The North American paddlefish is sometimes called spoonbill cat |

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| Weatherfishes | Family Cobitidae Genus <i>Misgurnus</i> | Become restless when atmospheric pressure drops | |
| Catfishes | Order Siluriformes | Barbels around the mouth reminiscent of cat whiskers | |
| Catsharks | Family Scyliorhinidae | Eyes resemble those of a cat | The largest shark family, with at least 160 species, one of which, interestingly, is called the mouse catshark (<i>Galeus murinus</i>) |
| Featherbacks | Family Notopteridae | Dorsal fin looks like a feather attached to the back | Some featherbacks also called knifefish, not to be confused with the Gymnotidae |
| Electric knifefishes | Family Gymnotidae | Laterally compressed body with anal fin all along the bottom | Are capable of electroreception |
| Salamanderfish | Family Lepidogalaxiidae (only one species: <i>Lepidogalaxias salamandroides</i>) | Unusual capacity to bend head sideways or downwards gives salamander-like appearance | |
| Barreleyes and spookfishes | Family Opisthoproctidae | Deep-sea fish with tubular eyes pointing upwards | |
| Gulpers | Family Saccopharyngidae | Deep-sea eels with huge jaws | Not to be confused with gulper sharks (family Centrophoridae) |
| Swallowers | Family Eurypharyngidae | Again, deep sea fish with huge jaws | |
| Pencilfishes | Genus Nannostomus Family Lebiasinidae | Attractively colored cylindrical body | |
| Headstanders | Family Chilodontidae Family Anostomidae | Head down posture, even while swimming | |
| Hatchetfishes | Family Gasteropelecidae | Hatchet-like laterally flattened body | They can leap from water and sail through the air |

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| Marine hatchetfishes | Family Sternoptychidae | Again, hatchet-like laterally flattened body | |
| Dragonfishes Snaggletooths Viperfishes | Family Stomiidae | Impressive teeth; elongate body | Deep sea dwellers |
| Daggertooth fishes | Family Anotopteridae | Impressive teeth | |
| Sabertoothfishes | Family Evenmannellidae | Impressive teeth | |
| Fangtoothfishes | Family Anoplogastridae | Impressive teeth | |
| Lizardfishes | Family Synodontidae | Lizard-like head when seen from the side | |
| Bombay ducks | Family Harpadontidae | One species commonly sold dry in Bombay | |
| Greeneyes Cucumberfishes | Family Chlorophthalmidae | Eyes of greenish iridescent color; smell like cucumbers | |
| Tripodfishes Spiderfishes | Some species of Family Ipnopidae | Lie on bottom, propped up on elongated tail fin ray and the two very long pelvic fins | |
| Lancetfishes | Family Alepisauridae | High sail-like dorsal fin | |
| Telescopefishes | Family Giganturidae | Tubular, telescopic eyes | |
| Pearleyes | Family Scopelarchidae | White spot on the eye | Spot may aid to gather light in the eyes of these deep sea dwellers |
| Barracunidas | Family Paralepididae | Superficial resemblance to barracudas | |
| Lanternfishes | Family Myctophidae | Light organs on head and body | The lanternsharks (Etmopteridae) are named for the same reason. |
| Rattails | Family Macrouridae | Long tapering tail | Some chimeras are called ratfish for the same reason |

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| Pearlfishes | Family Carapidae | Take refuge inside various invertebrates, including clams | |
| Toadfishes | Family Batrachoididae | Broad head and big eyes like toads | |
| Anglerfishes | Order Lophiiformes | Filaments on head lure prey near mouth | |
| Footballfishes | Family Himantolophidae | Oval-shaped body | An anglerfish family |
| Frogfishes | Family Antennariidae | Spherical body with wide mouth; eggs embedded in buoyant gelatinous mass | An anglerfish family |
| Seatoads | Family Chaunacidae | Balloon-shaped inflatable body with wide mouth | An anglerfish family |
| Batfishes | Family Ogcocephalidae | Greatly flattened body | An anglerfish family |
| Clingfishes | Order Gobiesociformes | Ventral sucker allows clinging to objects in strong currents | |
| Needlefishes | Family Belonidae | Long thin jaws and body | The largest among these flying fishes can impale sailors |
| Halfbeaks | Family Hemiramphidae | Lower jaw much longer than upper | |
| Ricefishes | Family Adrianichthyidae | Found in Japanese rice paddies | The medaka is the best known example |
| Silversides | Order Atheriniformes | Silvery colour | |
| Rainbowfishes | Family Melanotaeniidae | Colourful | |
| Inkfishes | Genera Radiicephalus, Lophotus, and Eumecichthys | Like squids and octopus, can eject a black fluid | |
| Oarfishes | Family Regalecidae | Long pelvic fins look like oars | The serpent-like <i>Regalecus glesne</i> is the longest bony fish, up to 12 m; likely the source of sea serpent sightings. |

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| Jellynosefishes | Family Ateleopodidae | Gelatinous snout | |
| Beardfishes | Family Polymixiidae | Two barbels on chin | |
| Squirrelfishes Soldierfishes | Family Holocentridae | Mostly red | |
| Pineapplefishes | Family Monocentridae | Large yellow scales cover the body | |
| Flashlightfishes | Family Anomalopidae | headlight-like luminous organ near eye | See Science 190: 74-76 (1975) |
| Sawbellies | Family Trachichthyidae | Large scales with spines along the belly | These fish are more commonly called roughies |
| Spinyfins | Family Diretmidae | Spines at base and along the finrays | |
| Pricklefishes | Family Stephanoberycidae | Scales have fine spines | |
| Pipefishes | Family Syngnathidae | Well-armored body and long snout | |
| Seahorses | Family Syngnathidae | Head shaped like a horse's head and neck | One of the most unusual body shapes of all fishes |
| Shrimpfishes or razorfishes | Family Centriscidae | Dorsal covering reminiscent of a shrimp rostrum, razor-like belly | Long body held with the head pointing down to imitate reeds |
| Trumpetfishes and cornetfishes | Family Aulostomidae | Long snout | |
| Sticklebacks | Family Gasterosteidae | Strong dorsal-fin spines | Very much used in behavioural research because they are hardy, social, and parental |
| Scorpionfishes | Family Scorpaenidae | Many species have venomous spines | |
| Turkeyfishes Firefishes Lionfishes | Family Scorpaenidae Genus Dendrochirus | Red and orange colour | Extensive (and venomous) spiny fins |
| Stonefishes | Family Scorpaenidae Genus Senanceia | Lie immobile on bottom | Venomous spines can cause death in humans |
| Waspfishes | Family Tetrarogidae | Venomous spines | |

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| Pigfishes Horsefishes | Family Congipodidae | Projecting snout with small mouth | A pig-like head is also a feature of bullhead sharks and horn sharks (family Heterodontidae) |
| Velvetfishes | Family Aploactidae | Velvet-like skin | |
| Combfishes | Family Zaniolepididae | Rough skin | Rough skin is also a feature of roughsharks (family Oxynotidae) |
| Filefishes Leatherjackets | Family Monacanthidae | Tiny spines on scales give body a rough texture | |
| Sea robins | Family Triglidae | Many species can make sounds | |
| Drums Croakers | Family Sciaenidae | Can make sounds | |
| Goatfishes | Family Mullidae | Two long chin barbels | |
| Slipmouths Ponyfishes | Family Leiognathidae | Very protrusible mouth | |
| Glassfishes | Family Ambassidae | Laterally compressed transparent body | “Glass” often features in the names of semi- transparent fishes, including outside this family. |
| Archerfishes | Family Toxotidae | Shoot a jet of water at insects sitting on leaves | Use a groove in the roof of their mouth to do it. |
| Cutlassfishes | Family Trichiuridae | Long metallic- looking body | |
| Surgeonfishes | Family Acanthuridae | One scalpel-like spine on each side of tail base | Don’t grasp them by the tail! |
| Rabbitfishes | Family Siganidae | Rabbit-like face | |
| Stargazers | Family Uranoscopidae | Eyes on top of head, pointing upwards when fish almost all buried in sand | The family Dactyloscopidae is known as sand stargazers for a similar reason |
| Sandburrowers Sanddivers Sandlances | Family Creediidae Family Trichonotidae Family Ammodytidae | Dive headfirst into sand | |

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| Parrotfishes | Family Scaridae | Teeth fused into a hard beak | |
| Triplefins | Family Tripterygiidae | Dorsal fin divided into three parts | |
| Tripletails | Family Lobotidae | Dorsal and anal fins are as big as, and overlap, the tail fin | Juveniles float leaflike on their sides in mangroves |
| Triggerfishes | Family Balistidae | First dorsal fin spine locked erect by second spine; pressing on second spine releases lock | |
| Boxfishes Trunkfishes Cowfishes | Family Ostraciidae | Body enclosed in armored plates; some have heads reminiscent of cows | |
| Pufferfishes | Family Tetraodontidae | Can puff up their body by pumping water into their stomach | Some are highly toxic |
| Porcupinefishes | Family Diodontidae | Long spines all around the body; can inflate body, erecting the spines | |
| Soapfishes | Family Serranidae Subfamily Grammistinae | Skin exudes a soap-like toxin | |
| Foureyes | Family Anablepidae | Pupil of each eye divided in upper and lower halves | Fish lives at surface and sees both in air and in water |
| Sleepers | Family Eleotridae | Sluggish behaviour | For the same reason, sharks of the family Somniosidae are called sleeper sharks |
| Numbfishes | Various species of electric rays (Order Torpediniformes) | Parts of your body will feel numb after these fishes zap you with an electric shock. | The name of the order (to which, incidentally, the torpedo ray belongs) comes from the latin <i>torpedo</i> which means numbness |

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| Combtooth blennies | Family Blenniidae | Sharp teeth form single row | |
| Poison-fanged blennies | Genus Meiacanthus | Hollow lower teeth can inject a toxin | |
| Alligator gar | <i>Lepisosteus spatula</i> | 3-m long scaly body, 140 kg, hovers just below the surface | |
| Oilfish | <i>Ruvettus pretiosus</i> | Very oily flesh | Sometimes called castor-oil fish because the flesh is also purgative |
| Wolf herring | <i>Denticeps clupeoides</i> | A species of herring with fang-like teeth | |
| Paradox fish | <i>Indostomus paradoxus</i> | Uncertain taxonomy | |
| Leafy seadragon | <i>Phycodorus eques</i> | A seahorse with numerous leaf-like projections on its body | An amazing example of camouflage |
| Reedfish / Ropefish | <i>Erpetoichthys (Calamoichthys) calabaricus</i> | Long and thin body | |
| Taillight shark | <i>Euprotomicroides zantedeschia</i> | Cloaca greatly enlarged as a luminous organ | |
| Blind shark | <i>Brachaelurus waddi</i> | Is actually sighted, but closes its eyes when out of water | |
| Happy Eddie Plain Happy Pretty Happy Happy Chappie | <i>Haploblepharus edwardsii</i> <i>Haploblepharus fuscus</i> <i>Haploblepharus pictus</i> <i>Haploblepharus</i> sp. | Curl up with tail over eyes when captured | These four sharks are also known as, respectively, puffadder, brown, dark, and eastern shysharks |
| Pyjama shark | <i>Poroderma africanum</i> | Stripes running the length of the body | Also called striped catshark |
| Cookiecutter sharks | <i>Isistius</i> spp. | Bite into skin and cut out a plug of flesh from larger fishes, leaving a crater wound | |
| Glass bloodfin | <i>Prionobrama filigera</i> | Semi-transparent body; males have deep red caudal fin. | “Glass” often features in the names of semi-transparent fishes. |

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| Moorish idol | <i>Zanclus cornutus</i> | Some Muslims on Indonesia's Ambon Island showed respect for this fish; Moors were also Muslims, though restricted to Africa. | |
| Lipstick leporinus | <i>Leporinus arcus</i> | Small red lips | There are also lipstick darters, lipstick gobies, and a lipstick surgeonfish |
| Bleeding heart tetra | <i>Hyphessobrycon erythrostigma</i> | Pink spot on flanks | |
| Blobfish | <i>Psychrolutes microporosus</i> | Amorphous body, gelatinous flesh, few muscles | Conserves energy at the great depths where it lives |
| Mouth almighty | <i>Glossamia aprion</i> | You've guessed it: the fish has a huge mouth. It is an Australian freshwater predator. | The following can be found in the names of various fish species: bigmouth, megamouth, largemouth, broadmouth, frogmouth, widemouth, smallmouth, narrowmouth, peemouth, gunmouth, umbrellamouth, tubemouth, anglemouth, suckermouth, flutemouth, purse-mouth, squaremouth, slipmouth, chiselmouth, hogmouth, birdmouth, hardmouth, bristlemouth, and (insert-almost-any-colour-here)mouth |

