

# Website expands efforts to help save endangered skates

AN online resource that aims to help save one of the largest and rarest creatures in British waters has been expanded.

The Skatespotter website is used by anglers to track the movements of critically endangered common skate.

The diamond-shaped fish – also known as flapper skates – can grow to more than six-and-a-half feet in length and weigh almost 16 stones.

But after being massively overfished for decades, the non-migratory marine species is officially at greater risk of extinction than the giant panda.

Skatespotter, a joint project

between Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS), was launched in 2018, encouraging anglers throughout Scotland to send photographs of common skate they catch and release to an online catalogue.

The movements of individual fish, identified by the distinctive spot patterns on their backs, are then monitored.

The Skatespotter website has now been updated to include historic records that give an improved insight into the lives of individual fish over time.

For the first time, historic

information from the Scottish Shark Tagging Programme dating to 1975 has been added, as well as additional tagging data and photographs from Orkney, Shetland, the Outer Hebrides and Portpatrick in Wigtownshire.

The data reveals details about skate living in the Loch Sunart to the Sound of Jura Marine Protected Area designated to help protect the species.

It found female skate are much more likely to be recaptured, because they tend to remain in the same area, while male skate are less frequently recaptured because they move around more.

Jane Dodd, SNH marine operations officer for Argyll and the Outer Hebrides, said yesterday: “Expanding Skatespotter to include this historical data for the first time is really exciting because it gives us lots more history for some of the individual skate.

“It helps us to build up a better picture of their movements over time that will in turn contribute to the long-term conservation of the species across Scotland.”

The common skate is thought to live up to 100 years, on a diet including crustaceans, clams, oysters, snails and small fish such as sand eel.