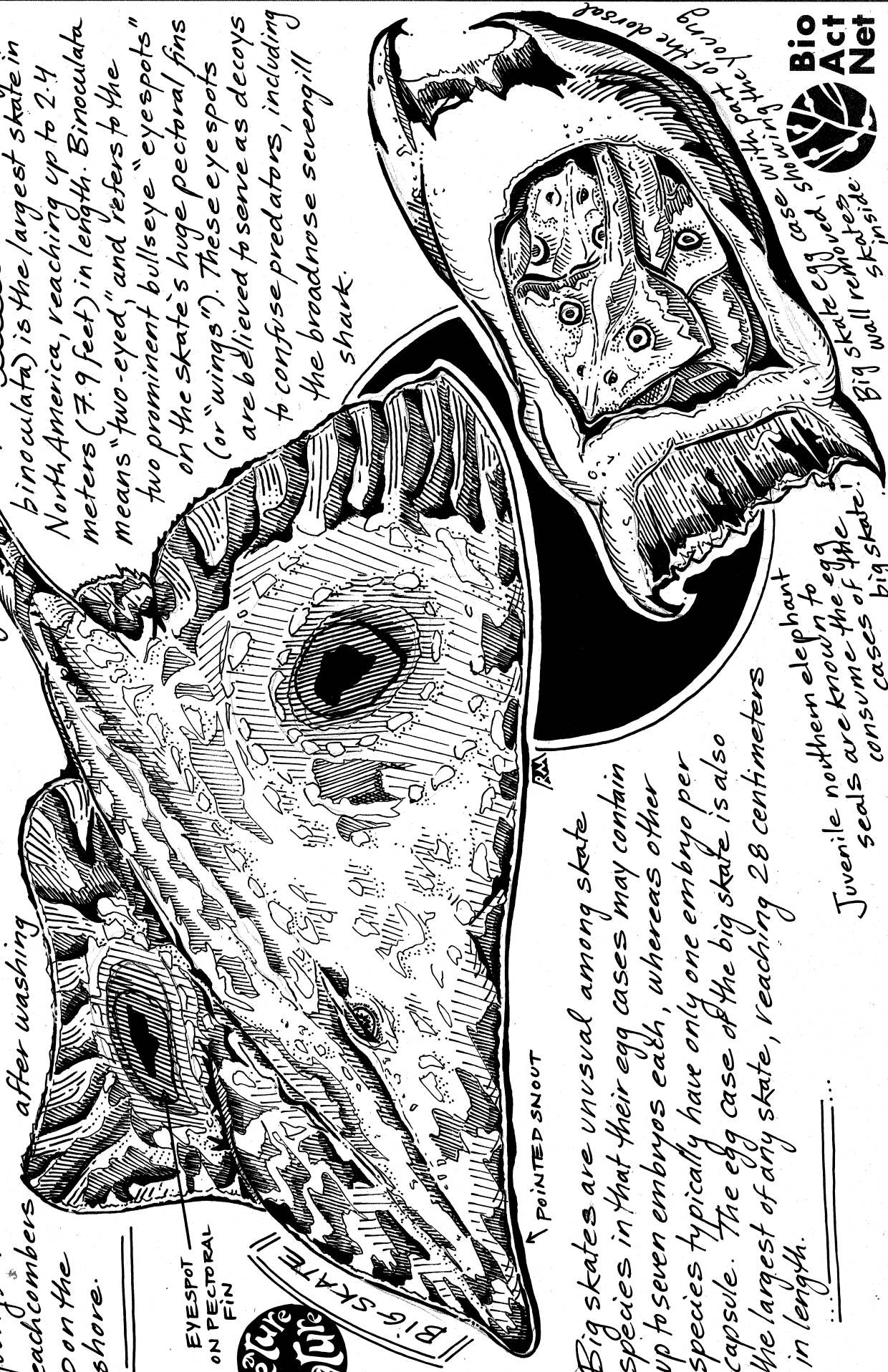


Among the cartilaginous fishes of the world, skates are one of the least understood and appreciated. They are notably different from their more charismatic cousins — the stingrays — in that they produce their young in dark, leathery “mermaid’s purses” (whereas stingrays give birth to live young). These cases can sometimes be found by beachcombers after washing up on the shore.

The **BIG SKATE** (*Beringaja binoculata*) is the largest skate in North America, reaching up to 2.4 meters (7.9 feet) in length. *Binoculata* means “two-eyed,” and refers to the two prominent bullseye “eyespot” on the skate’s huge pectoral fins (or “wings”). These eyespots are believed to serve as decoys to confuse predators, including the broadnose sevengill shark.



Big skates are unusual among skate species in that their egg cases may contain up to seven embryos each, whereas other species typically have only one embryo per capsule. The egg case of the big skate is also the largest of any skate, reaching 28 centimeters in length.

Juvenile northern elephant seals are known to eat the egg cases of big skate!

Big skate egg case, shown with part of the dorsal part of the young. Big skate egg case, shown with part of the dorsal part of the young. Big skate egg case, shown with part of the dorsal part of the young.

