Common Eagle Ray

Myliobatis aquila

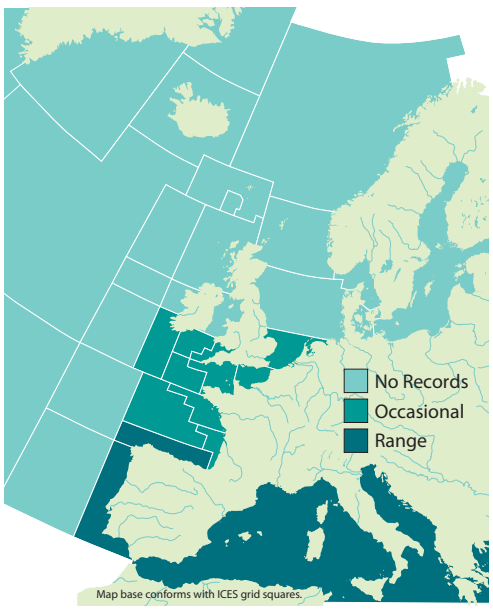
COMMON NAMES

Common Eagle Ray, Bull Ray, Sea Eagle, Whip-ray, Toad-fish, Aigle Commun (Fr), Aigle de Mer (Fr), Aguila Marina (Es), Adlerroche (De), Aquila di Mare (It), Ratão (Pr).

SYNONYMS

Raja aquila (Linnaeus 1758), *Myliobatis noctula* (Bonaparte 1833), *Pastinaca aquilai* (Gray 1854), *Raja rhombus* (Larrañaga 1923), *Myliobatis cervus* (Smith 1935), *Holorhinus aquila* (Fowler 1941).

DISTRIBUTION



Eastern Atlantic from the southern North Sea and Ireland to Morocco and the Canary Islands. Found throughout the Mediterranean but not present in the Black Sea. Also found around the coasts of South Africa and into the Indian Ocean as far north as Kenya (Luna, 2009).

APPEARANCE

- Disc width (DW) up to 83cm.
- Total length (TL) up to 260cm (including tail).
- Tail 2–2.5 times longer than body.
- One or more venomous spines near to the base of the tail 45mm (♀)-60mm (♂) in length.
- Average of 66 ♀-72 ♂ serrations on spine.
- Colour varies from dusky bronze to blackish on dorsal surface.
- Ventral surface white with brownish margin.

The body of the Common Eagle Ray is considerably wider than it is long. The head is moderately short and rounded with the pectoral fins joining underneath to form a subrostral lobe. The mouth is situated on the underside of the head and contains 1–7 series of teeth fused into dental plates. On the floor of the mouth there are several papillae (Bester, Unknown).

The tail is extremely long and whip-like, 2–2.5 times the length of the body (Bester, Unknown). At the base of the tail a single, venomous spine is normally found, although there are reports of fish with two or more (Wölfl, 1994). This spine is normally between 45–60mm in length depending on the sex and size of the ray. Adult males normally have around 72 serrations along the spine, adult females around 66 (Schwartz, 2007).

Colouration varies from dusky bronze/brown to almost black on the dorsal surface of the ray. The ventral surface is always white, sometimes with a brownish margin (Bester, Unknown). The maximum recorded size is 83cm DW and 260cm TL, including the tail (Serena, 2005).

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Common Eagle Ray

SIMILAR SPECIES

Mobula mobular, Giant Devil Ray

Pteromylaeus bovinus, Bull Ray

Rhinoptera marginata, Lusitanian Cownose Ray

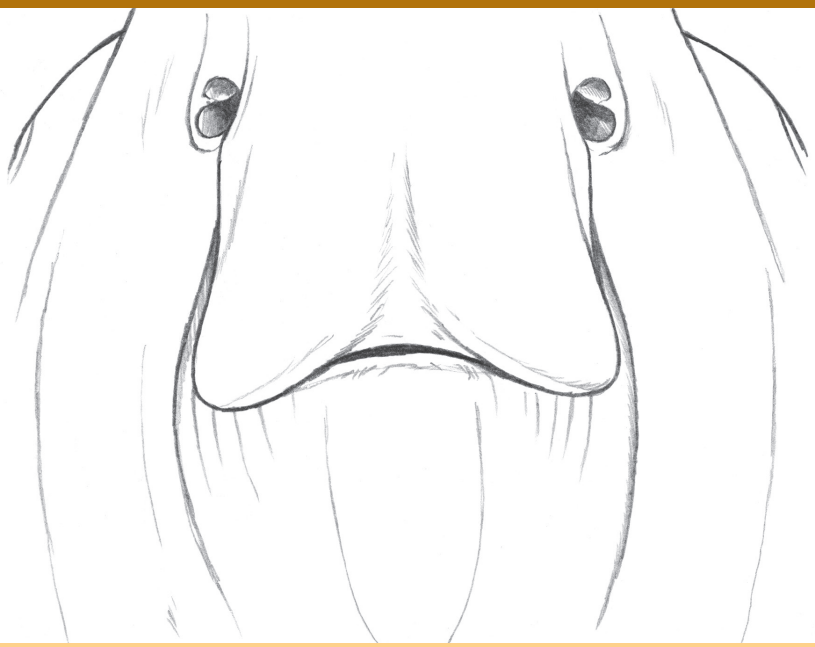
(Not to scale)

Common Eagle Ray

Myliobatis aquila

TEETH

There are 1–7 series of teeth fused into dental plates in each jaw (Bester, Unknown).



ECOLOGY & BIOLOGY

HABITAT

The Common Eagle Ray is semi-pelagic to depths of 300m (985ft), preferring shallow coastal areas such as lagoons and estuaries (Bester, Unknown). It is most common over sand flats on which it forages (Murch, Unknown).

DIET

A study from the eastern Adriatic showed that the Common Eagle Ray is an opportunistic predator feeding on a wide variety of species from the nematode, mollusc, polychaete, sipuncula, decapod crustacean and teleost groups. The most common prey items were *Aspidosiphon muelleri*, *Pteria hirundo* and *Cardium* spp. (Ivan *et al*., 2004).

REPRODUCTION

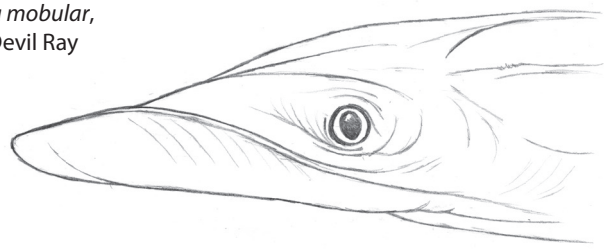
The Common Eagle Ray is an ovoviviparous species. Ovoviviparity, or leicithotrophic viviparity, is means of reproduction whereby the embryos develop within the female (Martin, Unknown). They are encased in a thin membrane which is retained in the uterus and nourished by the mother. In the Myliobatidae, Dasyatidae and Gymnuridae families, this nourishment is given through thousands of long threads called trophonemata which feed 'uterine milk' (protein-rich histotroph) directly into the embryos oesophagus through the spiracles (Martin, 1994).

Males reach sexual maturity at a total length of 40–50cm, females slightly larger at 60–70cm in length. The gestation period is approximately 6-8 months and 3–7 young are produced. The breeding period is probably between August and September and females most likely breed every other year (Capacé *et al*., 2007).

LATERAL VIEW OF HEAD

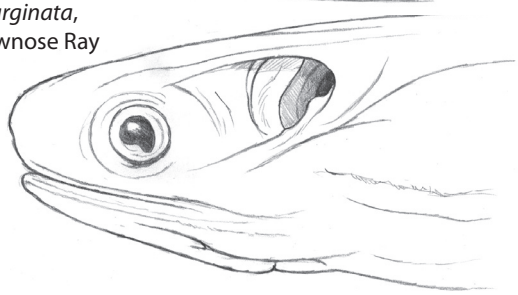
Myliobatis aquila,
Common Eagle Ray

Mobula mobular,
Giant Devil Ray



Pteromylaeus bovinus,
Bull Ray

Rhinoptera marginata,
Lusitanian Cownose Ray



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COMMERCIAL IMPORTANCE

The Common Eagle Ray is of minor commercial importance, taken as bycatch by bottom trawls, trammel nets, purse seines and longlines throughout its range. The flesh is eaten dried and salted and is utilized for fishmeal and oil. It is also considered a game fish and sought by recreational anglers, although the majority of those caught are released (Bester, Unknown).

IUCN RED LIST ASSESSMENT

Data Deficient (2008).

Near Threatened in Mediterranean.

THREATS, CONSERVATION, LEGISLATION

Regional populations are known to have declined in the northern Mediterranean but little data is currently available for the rest of the Mediterranean and the eastern Atlantic (Bester, Unknown).

HANDLING AND THORN ARRANGEMENT

- Handle with care.
- At least 1 large, venomous spine at base of tail.

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