

Skate and Ray Eggcase Identification Guide

This guide represents species commonly found around the UK coast. If your find is not represented in this guide visit www.eggcase.org for more details.



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NATURE

BLONDE

BLONDE RAY – *Raja brachyura*
Approx. capsule length 90 mm

Obvious keels.
Top horns much longer than bottom horns.
Similar eggcase: Thornback eggcase.
Difference: Blonde eggcase is much larger.



Blonde Ray adult

*Actual size of a Blonde Ray eggcase.

SMALL-EYED

SMALL-EYED RAY – *Raja microcellata*
Approx. capsule length 75 mm

Long filamentous horns at top.
Eggcase capsule is wider at top than bottom.
Obvious keels.



Small-eyed Ray adult

*Actual size of a Small-eyed Ray eggcase.

THORNBACK

THORNBACK RAY – *Raja clavata*
Approx. capsule length 65 mm

Quite 'square' in appearance.
Obvious keels.

Similar eggcase: Blonde eggcase.
Difference: Thornback eggcase is much smaller.



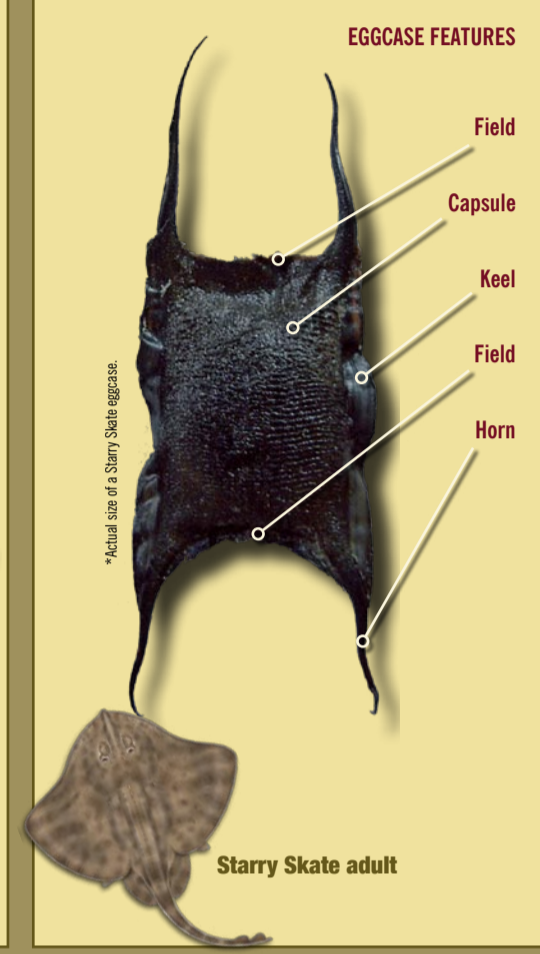
Thornback Ray adult

*Actual size of a Thornback Ray eggcase.

STARRY

STARRY SKATE – *Amblyraja radiata*
Approx. capsule length 35 mm

Very small.
Obvious keels.
Surface of capsule textured like stiff velvet.



Starry Skate adult

*Actual size of a Starry Skate eggcase.

Soaking eggcases in water for an hour makes identification easier

CATSHARKS

**SMALLSPOTTED CATSHARK
*Scyliorhinus canicula***
Approx. length 40 mm

Short, narrow capsule.
If unbroken, long curly tendrils at each end.

Similar eggcase: Nursehound eggcase.
Difference: Smallspotted Catshark eggcase is much smaller.



*Actual size of a Smallspotted Catshark eggcase.

**NURSEHOUND
*Scyliorhinus stellaris***
Approx. length 90 mm

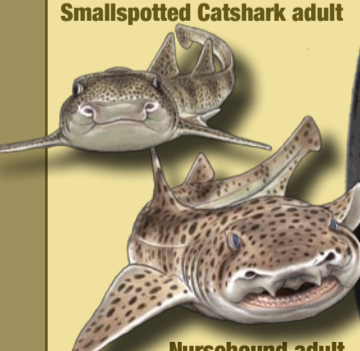
Long, narrow capsule.
Thick sides to capsule
If unbroken, long curly tendrils at each end.

Similar eggcase: Smallspotted Catshark eggcase.
Difference: Nursehound eggcase is much larger.



*Actual size of a Nursehound eggcase.

Smallspotted Catshark adult



Nursehound adult

You may know these species as dogfish, but they are in truth catsharks, as true dogfish give birth to live young.

UNDULATE

UNDULATE RAY – *Raja undulata*
Approx. capsule length 70 mm

No keels.
More commonly found in southwest of UK.

Similar eggcase: Spotted eggcase.
Difference: Undulate eggcase is much larger.



Undulate Ray adult

*Actual size of a Undulate Ray eggcase.

SPOTTED

SPOTTED RAY – *Raja montagui*
Approx. capsule length 60 mm

No keels.
Nationwide distribution around the UK.

Similar eggcase: Undulate eggcase
Difference: Spotted eggcase is much smaller.

Similar eggcase: Cuckoo eggcase.
Difference: Spotted eggcase is less rounded and has shorter top horns.



Spotted Ray adult

*Actual size of a Spotted Ray eggcase.

CUCKOO

CUCKOO RAY – *Leucoraja naevus*
Approx. capsule length 50 mm

Small, delicate, rounded eggcase.
If unbroken, very long horns at top. No keels.

Similar eggcase: Spotted eggcase.
Difference: Cuckoo eggcase is more rounded and has longer top horns.



Cuckoo Ray adult

*Actual size of a Cuckoo Ray eggcase.



www.sharktrust.org

Approximate sizes are for soaked eggcases and excluding horns



www.eggcase.org

Join the Great Eggcase Hunt

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What does a mermaid keep in her purse?

Baby sharks, skates and rays of course!

With over 600 species of skate and ray worldwide, at least 15 species are regularly encountered in UK coastal waters, many of which reproduce by laying tough, leathery eggcases known as 'mermaid's purses'. The eggcases of approximately eight skate and ray and two shark species are commonly found along the strandlines of UK beaches.

Each species lay eggcases in different shapes and sizes, which remain on the seabed or attached to seaweed for several months while the embryo inside develops into a miniature skate, ray or shark. Once empty, the eggcases are often washed ashore and can be found amongst the seaweed in the strandline. The Shark Trust's *Skate and Ray ID Guide* and *Shark ID Guide* provide an abundance of information on the animals that lay these eggcases, and are available for download at www.sharktrust.org/id.



Why report eggcases?

The distribution of different shark, skate and ray species is changing and a number of species are in decline. By taking part in the Great Eggcase Hunt you are helping the Shark Trust to identify areas of the coast where eggcases regularly wash up. Eggcases may indicate that nursery grounds are nearby and identifying these grounds can assist in the conservation of sharks, skates and rays. Your eggcase records are a crucial element of this conservation work.

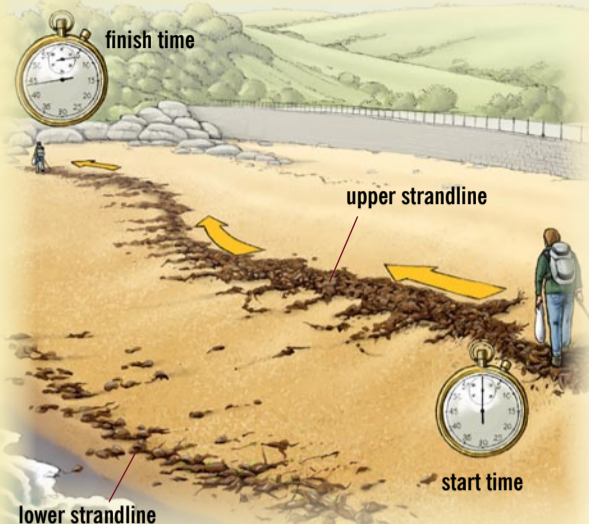
How to hunt...

Eggcases can be found on the beach all year round, so always keep your eyes open!

The Chance Find You may simply be out walking your dog on the local beach when you discover an eggcase. Fantastic! Report it to us so we can add your find to our database.

Simple Science Set out a timed walk of a set distance.

Beach Survey Walk the length of the beach along the lower strandline and then return along the higher strandline, recording as you go.



Please make sure you record the location, date and any relevant comments before you leave the beach. It would be fantastic if you can provide a grid reference from an Ordnance Survey map or an exact GPS location from a Sat Nav or smart phone, as we can then map your find more accurately.



Image © Rachel Coppock

How to report your findings

Visit www.eggcase.org.

- Submit an online recording form.
- Attach photographs of the eggcases against a scale (such as a tape measure or 2p coin) so we can verify your records. If you are in any doubt about your species or think you may have found an interesting one then please post it to us so we can have a closer look.



Undulate Ray *Raja undulata* Vs. Spotted Ray *Raja montagui*

Found Nothing?

If you have been out hunting but have failed to find any eggcases, this is still valuable information and is known as a negative record, so please keep reporting these findings (or lack of!). Some beaches are cleaned by local councils and so eggcases may be removed along with seaweed, whereas other beaches just may not have any at that time.

Eggcases Underwater

'Eggcases Underwater' is aimed at divers and uses photo-identification to link beach records with actual egg-laying grounds on the seabed. So while diving, keep your eyes peeled for *insitu* eggcases on the seabed and report any sightings to the Trust along with any photographs you have taken. Remember to take only photographs as the eggcases are likely to still have developing embryos inside!



Image © Angela Keill

Bucket Science

Fill a container with water and submerge the eggcase, leaving it to soak for a few hours. Larger eggcases and those that have been out of the water for a while will need longer to soak in order to fully hydrate. Once the eggcases are ready, use this guide to identify your eggcase!



The following eggcases are rarely found in UK waters and are currently under much debate.

COMMON SKATE

This species has now been recognised as two distinct species (Flapper and Blue Skate) that have long been confused under the single scientific name *Dipturus batis*. Work is still being undertaken to identify the differences in the two species eggcases:



Flapper Skate eggcase in comparison to an adults hand

FLAPPER SKATE *Dipturus intermedia*

Found primarily along the NW coast of Scotland (below left). Eggcase is large at approximately 120mm – 180mm in length.



BLUE SKATE *Dipturus flossada*

Found off the SW coast of Ireland along the continental shelf (above right). Eggcase of Blue Skate still to be confirmed.

WHITE SKATE *Rostroraja alba*

This is a very large, square eggcase with an approximate capsule (excluding horns) length of between 125mm – 183mm. It has extremely long top horns and strong ridges from top to bottom.



White Skate eggcase in comparison to an adults hand

Work is also being undertaken to confirm the identification of the eggcases of: **LONG-NOSED SKATE** *Dipturus oxyrinchus* and **BLACK SKATE** *Dipturus nidarosiensis*



THE SHARK TRUST

Advancing the worldwide conservation of sharks through science, education, influence and action. The Shark Trust is a membership organisation. Join the Trust and contribute to the future survival of these fascinating yet vulnerable species.

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Identification Guide

