

# EGGCASE IDENTIFICATION KEY

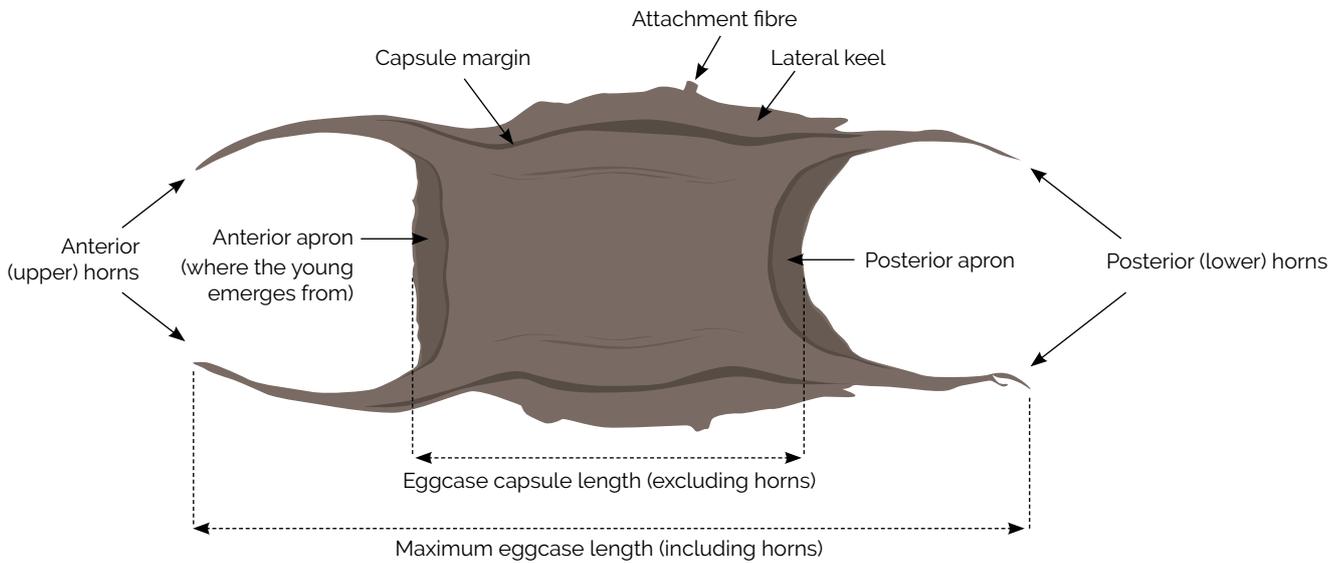
The eggcases within this ID key can be found around the British Isles and northwest Europe - use it to help you identify your finds and then report them to the Great Eggcase Hunt! We love to hear about finds outside of the UK too so please still record them!

## TOP TIP!

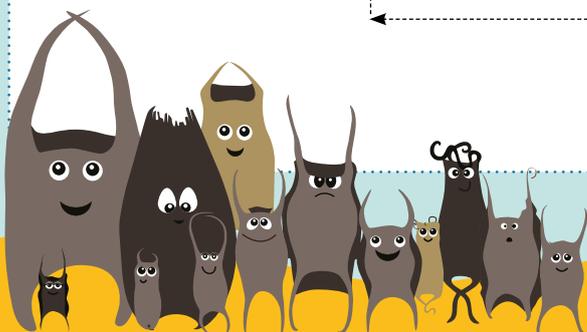
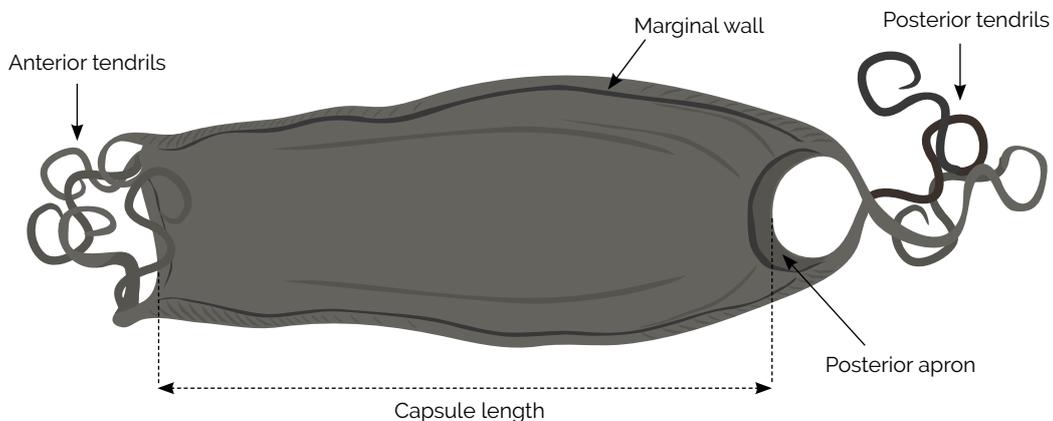
Stranded eggcases can often be dry and brittle. Before identification, rehydrate your eggcase by soaking it in water (a few hours for the smaller species but overnight for the larger species). You'll see that it expands to its original, flexible state.

## FEATURES OF A SKATE/RAY\* EGGCASE

\* Despite truly being skate, many species are referred to as rays in their common names. True skate produce eggcases, true rays have live young.



## FEATURES OF A SHARK EGGCASE



THE APPROXIMATE SIZES USED WITHIN THIS ID KEY ARE FOR SOAKED EGGCASES, AND THE EGGCASE IMAGES ARE DISPLAYED AGAINST AN ADULT'S HAND.

1a

## CATSHARKS

*Scyliorhinidae*



**Eggcase elongated** (length approximately 2.5 times the width). Has curled tendrils on each corner or short horns (depending on species).

YES > Go to 2



1b

## SKATE/RAYS

*Rajidae*



**Eggcase squarer/rectangular** in shape and (if not broken) has a horn extending from each corner of the capsule (more pronounced in some species).

YES > Go to 3



2a

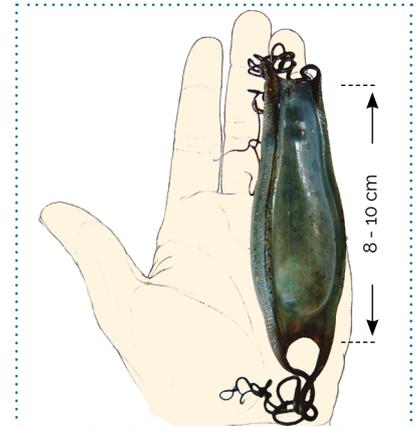
- **Moderately large** eggcase.
- Approximate capsule length **8-10 cm** (excluding tendrils).
- Thick walls run the length of the capsule joining the two sides.
- Thick, curly tendrils extend from each corner.
- 📍 Predominantly south and southwestern coasts of the British Isles, common on western coasts of Wales.

YES



### NURSEHOUND/BULL HUSS *Scyliorhinus stellaris*

Shape is similar to that of the Smallspotted Catshark (2b), however the Nursehound eggcase is much larger and more robust.



2b

- **Small** eggcase.
- Approximate capsule length **5-7 cm** (excluding tendrils).
- Fine, curly tendrils protrude from each corner.
- Colour is highly variable for this species and should not be used as a distinguishing feature.
- 📍 All coasts of the British Isles.

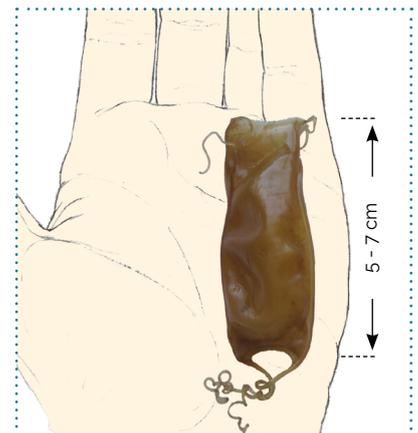
YES



### SMALLSPOTTED CATSHARK/LESSER SPOTTED DOGFISH

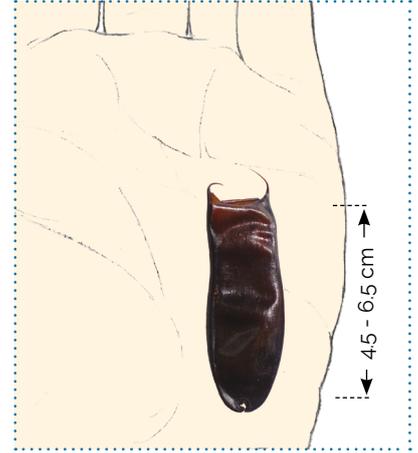
*Scyliorhinus canicula*

Smallspotted Catshark eggcases with broken tendrils could be mistaken for Blackmouth Catshark eggcases (2c).



2c

- **Small** eggcase.
  - Approximate capsule length **4.5-6.5 cm**.
  - No tendrils.
  - Instead has two short, curved anterior horns and short, hooked posterior horns that curve in to meet.
- 📍 Offshore - not washed up frequently.



YES  
✓

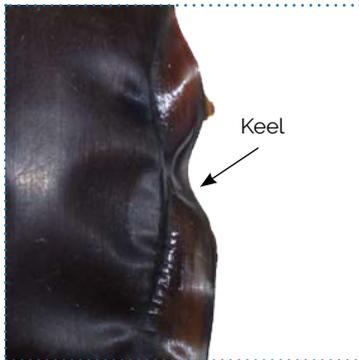
**BLACKMOUTH CATSHARK** *Galeus melastomus*

Similar size and shape to Smallspotted Catshark eggcase (2b) and could be mistaken for specimens with broken tendrils.



3a

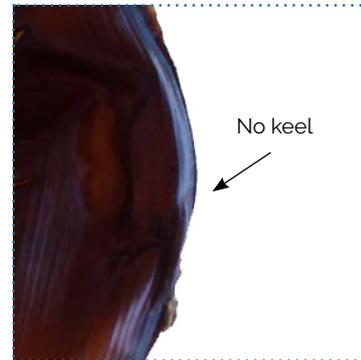
- **Lateral keels are present** on the eggcase.



YES > Go to 4

3b

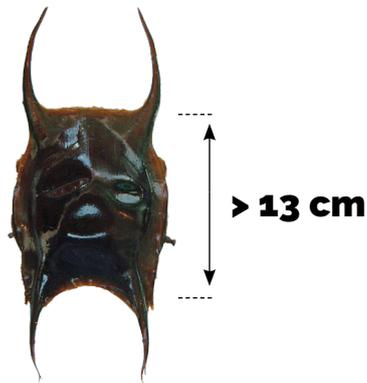
- **No lateral keels.** (Although a small fringe or fibrous attachments may be present).



NO KEELS > Go to 11

4a

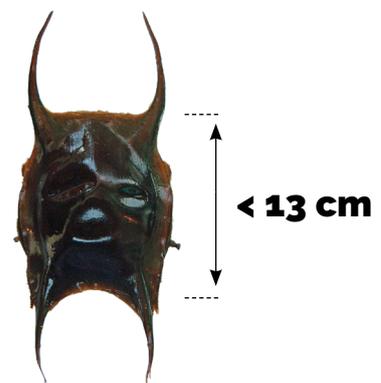
- Eggcase capsule (excluding horns) **GREATER than 13 cm.**



YES > Go to 5

4b

- Eggcase capsule (excluding horns) **LESS than 13 cm.**



YES > Go to 8

**5a**

- **Large** eggcase.
- Pale brown in colour.
- Capsule surface covered with dense fibrous layer that easily peels away (giving a bark-like appearance) to reveal darker capsule beneath.

**> 13 cm****YES > Go to 6****5b**

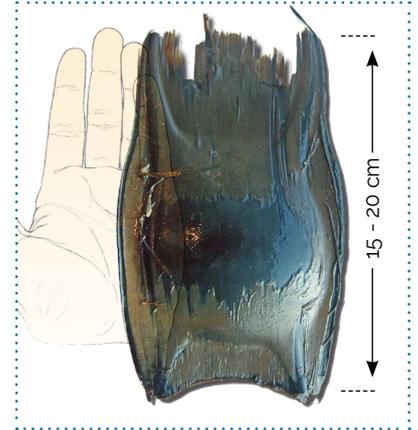
- **Large** eggcase.
- But *not* as described in 5a.

**> 13 cm****YES > Go to 7****6a**

- **Very large** eggcase.
  - Approximate capsule length **15-20 cm**.
  - Anterior apron is deep and usually ragged.
- 📍 Predominantly northern and western coasts of Scotland and the Northern Isles.

**YES**  
✓**FLAPPER (OR COMMON) SKATE** *Dipturus intermedius*

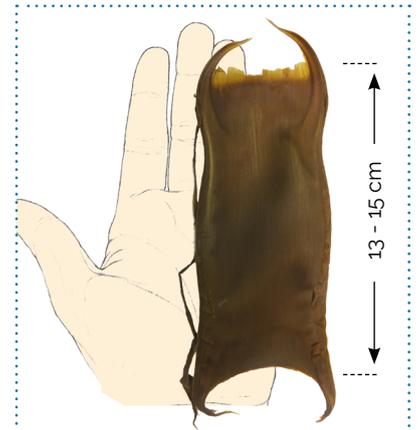
Previously called Common Skate until this was recognised as being two species (Flapper Skate and Blue Skate).

**6b**

- **Large** eggcase.
  - Approximate capsule length **13-15 cm**.
  - Eggcase pinches at base of anterior horns where they meet the capsule.
- 📍 Predominantly western Ireland and southwestern England.

**YES**  
✓**BLUE SKATE** *Dipturus batis*

**Rare find!** Very few Blue Skate eggcases have been reported to the Great Eggcase Hunt.



**Eggcase NOT as described in 6a or 6b?** Go back to step 5 and check the description.

**7a**

- **Very large** robust eggcase.
  - Approximate capsule length **13-15 cm** and total length with horns **>20 cm**.
  - Prominent upper horns that are ribbon-like, and short hooked lower horns.
  - Capsule surface has a distinct textured pattern, with a lattice-like appearance.
- 📍 Irish and southwestern coasts of UK (Celtic Sea).

**YES**  
✓**WHITE SKATE** *Rostroraja alba*

**Rare find!** This species has limited distribution in the Northeast Atlantic and is rarely recorded to the Great Eggcase Hunt.

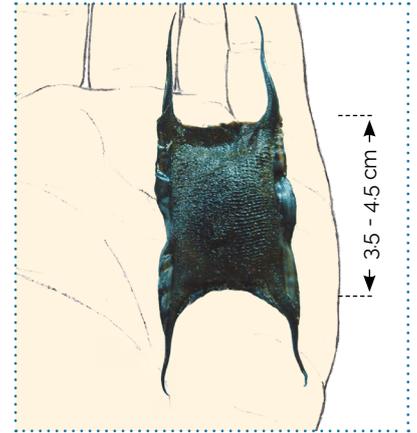


**!** Eggcase NOT as described in 7a? Go back to step 5 and check the description.

**8a**

- **Very small** eggcase.
- Approximate capsule length **3.5 - 4.5 cm**.
- Capsule has longitudinal striations and latitudinal ridges giving a 'washboard' texture.

 Usually North Sea coasts.



**YES**  
✓

**STARRY SKATE** *Amblyraja radiata*

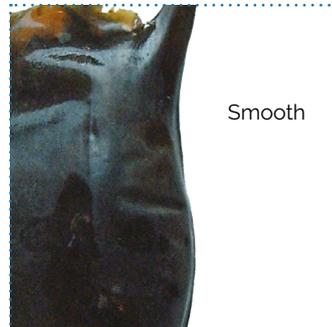
Deep-water offshore species, eggcases are normally found along North Sea coasts.



**8b**

- **Capsule body smooth** in appearance.
- Striations **may or may not be present** and should not be confused with the 'washboard' texture.

**YES > Go to 9**



**9a**

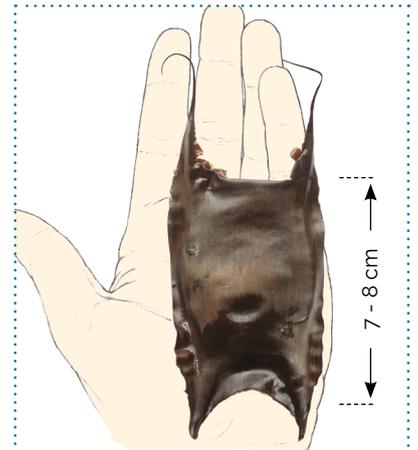
- **Medium-large** eggcase.
- Approximate capsule length **7-8 cm**.
- Capsule tapers from top to bottom.
- Upper horns are long and filamentous (if intact).
- Lower horns are short and hooked.

 Southern and southwestern coasts of British Isles.

**YES**  
✓

**SMALL-EYED RAY** *Raja microocellata*

If upper horns are broken, could be mistaken for a Thornback Ray eggcase (10b).



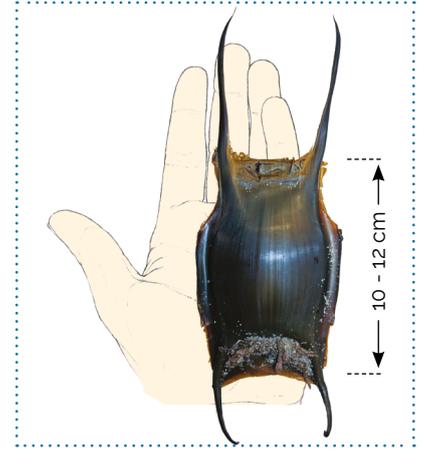
**9b**

- Eggcase NOT as described above.
- Capsule is squarer/rectangular in shape.

**TRUE > Go to 10**

10a

- **Large** eggcase.
  - Approximate capsule length **10-12 cm**.
  - Often has a distinctive pinch at the base of the upper horns.
- 📍 More common on southern and southwestern coasts of British Isles.



YES ✓

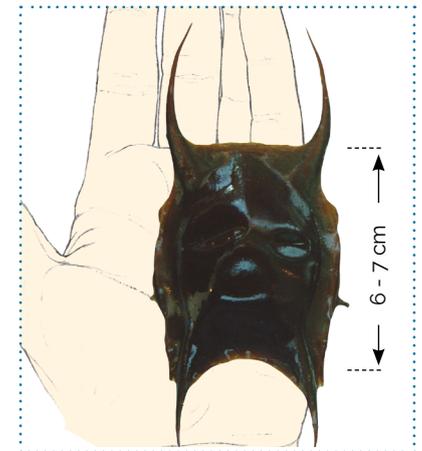
**BLONDE RAY** *Raja brachyura*

Similar shape to the Thornback Ray eggcase (10b) but much larger in size.



10b

- **Moderate sized** eggcase.
  - Approximate capsule length **6-7 cm**.
  - Shape can vary between being square and rectangular.
  - Robust eggcase with well-formed keels and horns.
  - Upper and lower horns of a similar length.
- 📍 All coasts of the British Isles.



YES ✓

**THORNBACK RAY** *Raja clavata*

One of the more commonly found skate eggcases.



**Eggcase NOT described as in 10a or 10b?** Go back to step 3 and check if the eggcase has keels.

11a

- **Small** eggcase that is **rounded** in shape.
  - Approximate capsule length **5-6 cm**.
  - Upper horns (if intact) are very long - about twice the length of the lower horns - and curve inwards.
- 📍 Predominantly southwestern, western and northern coasts of the British Isles.



YES ✓

**CUCKOO RAY** *Leucoraja naevus*

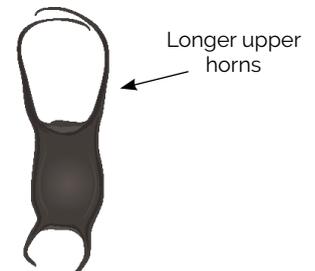
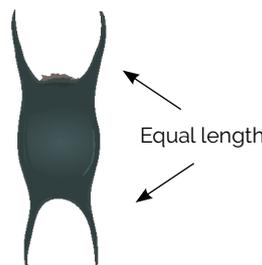
Viewed from the side, this eggcase has a sleigh-like shape.



11b

- **Upper and lower horns are approximately equal length (if intact).**

**TRUE > Go to 12**



12a

- **Medium-large** eggcase.
- Approximate capsule length **7-8 cm**.
- Small fringe or additional fibres may be present on the margins.

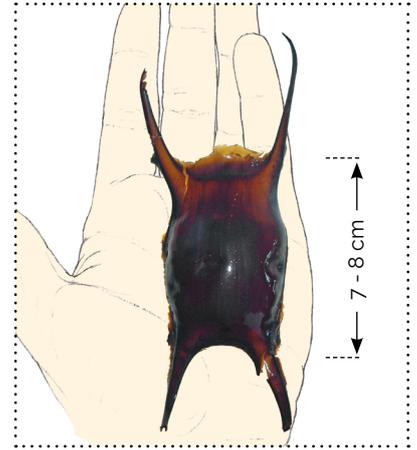
📍 Southern England, Channel Islands, and southwestern Ireland.

YES



**UNDULATE RAY** *Raja undulata*

Could be mistaken for Spotted Ray (12b) due to overlapping size and a cross-over of species range. Undulate Ray eggcase is generally larger and species distribution is more limited.



12b

- **Small neat** eggcase.
- Approximate capsule length **5-7 cm**.

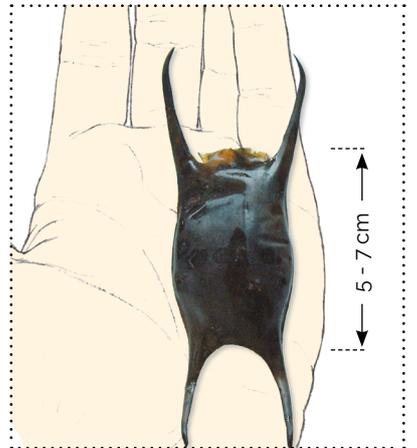
📍 All coasts of the British Isles.

YES



**SPOTTED RAY** *Raja montagui*

Could be mistaken for Undulate Ray (12a) due to overlapping size and a cross-over of species range. Spotted Ray eggcase is generally smaller and species has a wider distribution.



**Eggcase NOT described as in 12a or 12b?** Go back to step 3 and check if the eggcase has keels.

## CONGRATULATIONS ON IDENTIFYING YOUR EGGCASE!

You can now **record your find to the Great Eggcase Hunt!** Please include photos so we can verify species identification.

If you're still unsure about species ID, then record your find as 'Don't know' and be sure to upload photos (against a ruler or something to show scale).

**Thank you for taking part in the Great Eggcase Hunt!**



Record your eggcase here!