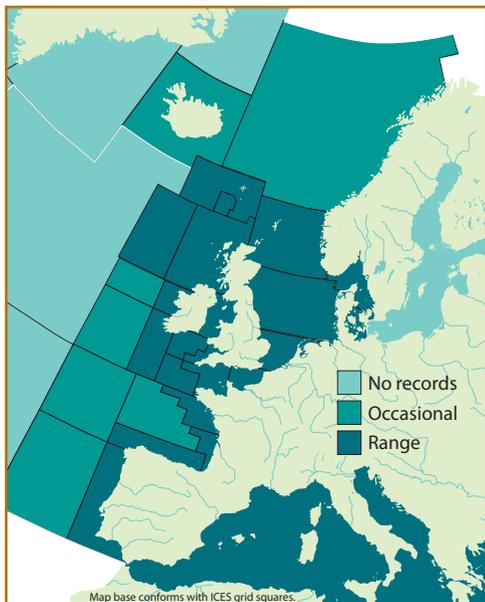


## SCIENTIFIC NAME

*Raja clavata* (Linnaeus, 1758).

## DISTRIBUTION

Throughout the northeast Atlantic, Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea and western Baltic Sea. Also off southern Africa<sup>vi</sup>.



## COMMON NAME

**THORNBACK RAY**, Thornback Skate, Roker, Maiden Ray, Hardback, Stekelrog (Ne), Raie Bouclée (Fr), Nagelroche (De), Raya de Clavos (Es), Piggskate (No).

## IDENTIFICATION

- 1 Dark/light banding on tail.
- 2 Scattered dorsal buckler thorns, occasionally ventral.
- 3 Wholly spinulose dorsal surface.
- 4 Rows of 25–50 thorns on midline<sup>vi</sup>.

## COLOUR

- Dorsal surface dark brown to grey.
- Patterning highly variable from extensive yellow marbling to few light spots.
- Ventral surface creamy white with darker margin<sup>i</sup>.

## BIOLOGY AND SIZE

- Born: 10–13cm<sup>v</sup>. Mature: 60–85cm ♀, 60–77cm ♂<sup>vi</sup>. Max TL: 130cm ♀<sup>vii</sup>, 105cm ♂<sup>viii</sup>.
- Juveniles feed on small crustaceans, adults on larger crustaceans and a variety of fish<sup>iv</sup>.
- Segregate by size and sex, juveniles more often found inshore (<30m)<sup>v</sup>.



## SIMILAR SPECIES

- *Raja brachyura*, **Blonde Ray**, illustrated
- *Amblyraja radiata*, **Starry Skate**, illustrated
- *Raja asterias*, **Starry Ray**
- *Leucoraja fullonica*, **Shagreen Ray**

Colouration similar  
to Blonde Ray

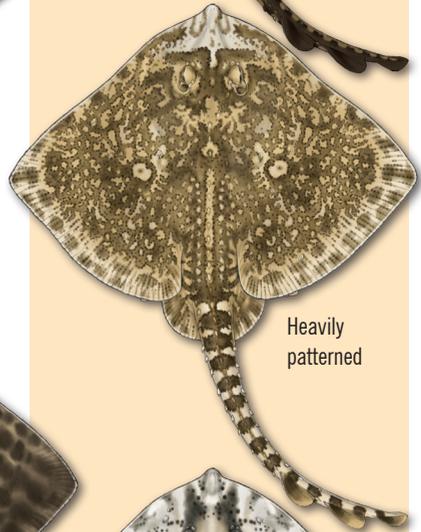
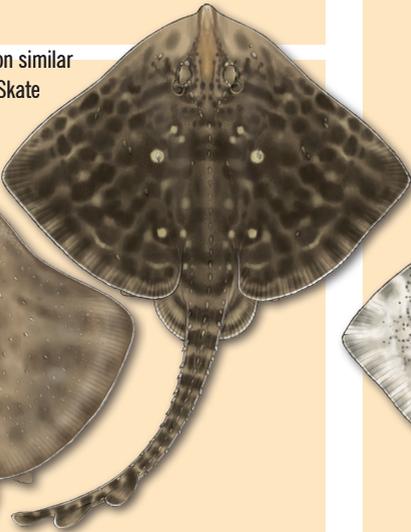
**Blonde Ray**  
*Raja brachyura*



Dark

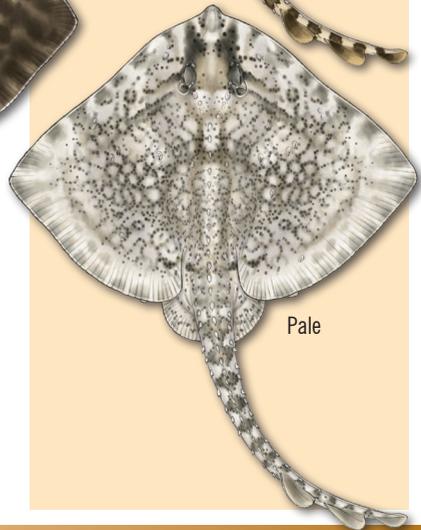
Colouration similar  
to Starry Skate

**Starry Skate**  
*Amblyraja radiata*



Heavily  
patterned

Pale





- ◉ Less than 60 rows<sup>iii</sup> of teeth, usually 36–44 in the upper jaw<sup>i</sup>.
- ◉ Sharp teeth in mature males, molar-like teeth in females and juveniles<sup>ii</sup>.

### HABITAT

- ◉ Temperate to sub-tropical, 10–300m<sup>x</sup>.
- ◉ Demersal, adults make seasonal migrations inshore to mate and spawn<sup>vii</sup>.
- ◉ Prefer soft substrates such as sand and mud but can be found over coarser ground<sup>x</sup>.

### EGGCASE

### CONSERVATION STATUS

- ◉ It is long lived, matures late and has a low fecundity, making it vulnerable to fisheries pressure<sup>x</sup>. Its range appears to have contracted, particularly in the North Sea<sup>ii</sup>.
- ◉ **Red List status:** Near Threatened (2000).

### COMMERCIAL IMPORTANCE

- ◉ One of the most common skate in European fish markets. Constitute an important part of many demersal fisheries<sup>iv</sup>.
- ◉ Targeted by gillnet, set net and longline fisheries. Substantial numbers are taken as bycatch in otter and beam trawls<sup>x</sup>.
- ◉ Readily taken by rod and reel and are targeted by recreational anglers<sup>vi</sup>.
- ◉ 2009 – Species currently subject to TAC in EU waters.



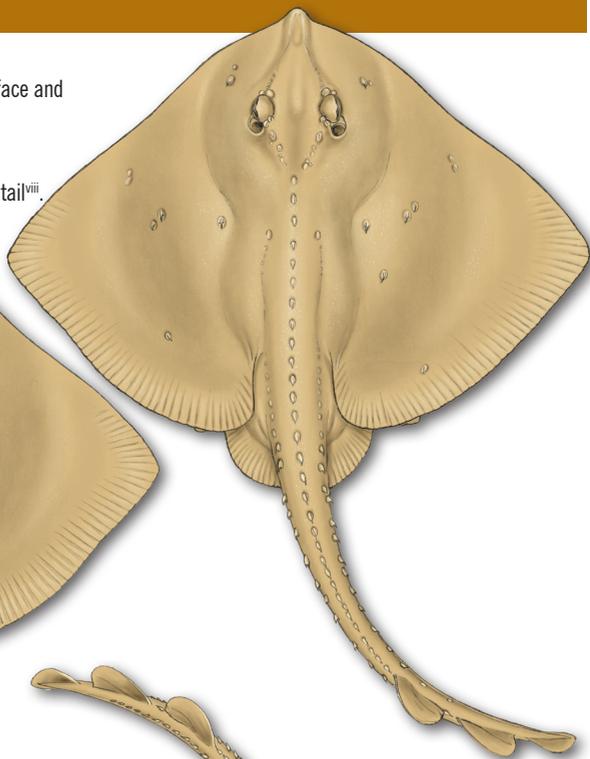
- 1 50–90mm in length (excluding horns).
- 2 Capsule almost as wide as long.
- 3 Obvious keels and fields<sup>ix</sup>.

Similar eggcase to the Blonde Ray, *Raja brachyura*, but significantly smaller.

(Eggcase shown actual size.)

## HANDLING AND THORN ARRANGEMENT

- Handle with care.
- Large, scattered buckler thorns on dorsal surface and occasionally ventral surface.
- Strong midline of thorns.
- Lateral pairs of thorns sometimes present on tail<sup>viii</sup>.



Bucklers

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- i. Clark, R. S.; 1926. Fishery Board for Scotland.
- ii. Ellis, J. *et al*; 2000. IUCN Red List.
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- vii. Hunter, E. *et al*; 2005. *JMBA* Vol. 85: 1095–1105.
- viii. Lockley, P; 2009. *Fishing News*.
- ix. Shark Trust; 2008.
- x. Whitehead, P. J. P. *et al*; 1986. UNESCO.

