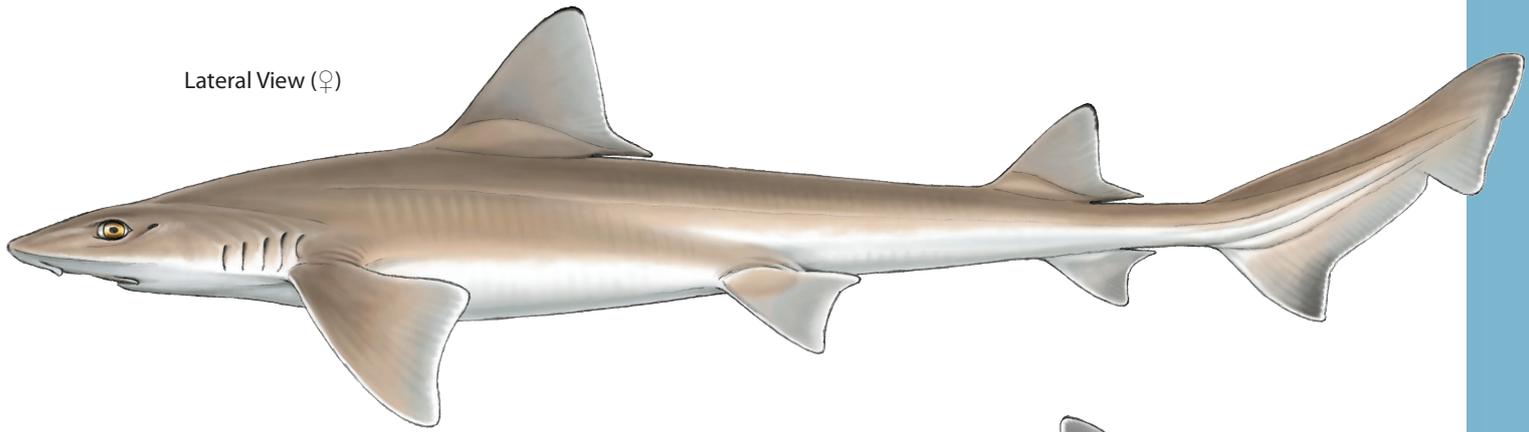
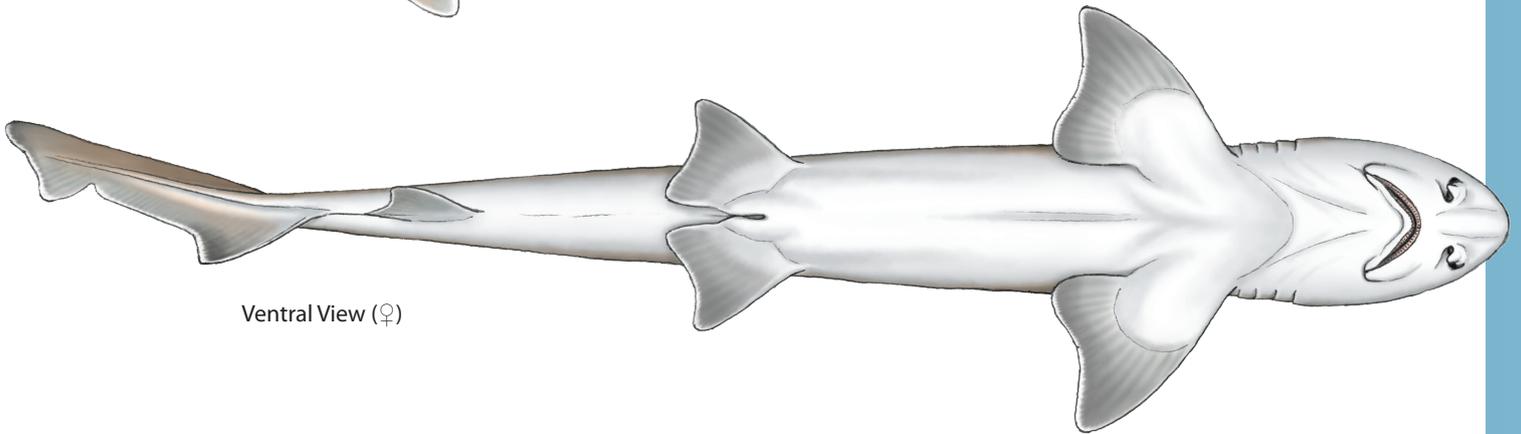


Lateral View (♀)



Ventral View (♀)



COMMON NAMES

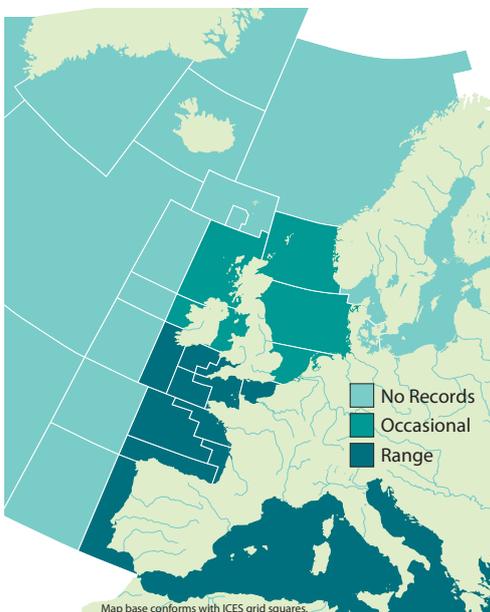
Common Smoothhound, Grey Mouth Dog, Common Houndshark, Smooth Dogfish, Sweet William, Emissole Lisse (Fr), Musola (Es).

SYNONYMS

Squalus mustelus (Linnaeus, 1758), *Mustelus laevis* (Linck, 1790), *Mustelus vulgaris* (Cloquet, 1821), *Mustelus levis* (Risso, 1826), *Mustelus equestris* (Bonaparte, 1834).

DISTRIBUTION

The range of the Common Smoothhound was until very recently believed to cover the northeast Atlantic from the British Isles



to Madeira and the Canary Isles, including the Mediterranean Sea (Compagno, 1984). Genetic studies are beginning to show that confusion with the Starry Smoothhound, *Mustelus asterias*, could have led to an overestimate of its range (Farrell *et al.*, 2009). It is also known from South Africa (Compagno, 1984).

APPEARANCE

- Dorsal fins large and prominent, the first larger than the second.
- First dorsal fin originates over pectoral free tips.
- No dorsal spines.
- Large pectoral fins.
- Anal fin present.
- Large dorsal caudal lobe with large subterminal notch and lobe.
- Grey or grey-brown dorsally.
- Ventrally light.

The Common Smoothhound is a slender species with two large, prominent dorsal fins, the first larger than the second. The first dorsal fin originates over the base of the pectoral fins, the second just forward of the anal fin. There are no dorsal spines and the free rear tips are small. The dorsal caudal lobe is large with a strong terminal notch and lobe. It can be an easily identifiable species as it is the only member of the *Mustelus* genus without white or black spots in European waters. However, on the Starry Smoothhound, *Mustelus asterias*, these spots can be faded or completely absent meaning that any *Mustelus* spp. with no white spots cannot automatically be attributed to the Common Smoothhound (Farrell *et al.*, 2009).

Positive identification can be made physically in 3 ways. Firstly, buccopharyngeal denticles cover the entire palate and floor of the mouth in the Starry Smoothhound but only the tongue tip and extreme anterior end of the palate in the Common Smoothhound. Secondly, the longitudinal ridges of the dermal denticles extend only half way along their length in the Starry Smoothhound, whereas in the Common Smoothhound they extend along their entire length (Compagno, 1984). Lastly, the connection between the female and the embryo is different between the species. None of these methods

APPEARANCE CONTINUED

are particularly useful for live specimens or large numbers of sharks. The last in particular only works for gravid females landed whole. Genetic identification methods are therefore becoming more widespread (Farrell *et al.*, 2009).

Amongst similar species from different genus, it can be distinguished from the Tope Shark, *Galeorhinus galeus*, by the large second dorsal fin (larger than the anal fin) and from the Spiny Dogfish, *Squalus acanthias*, by the presence of an anal fin and absence of dorsal spines (Compagno, 1984).

SIMILAR SPECIES

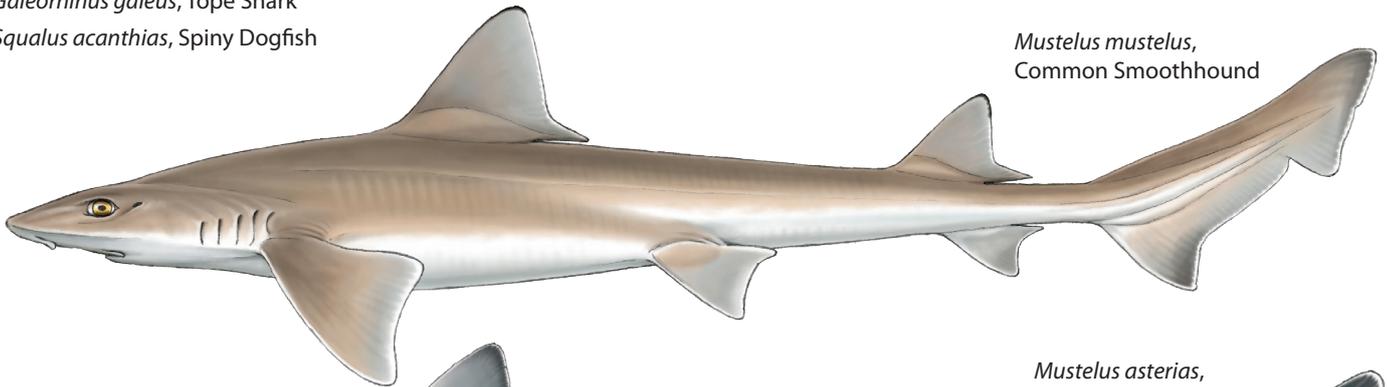
Mustelus asterias, Starry Smoothhound

Mustelus punctulatus, Blackspotted Smoothhound

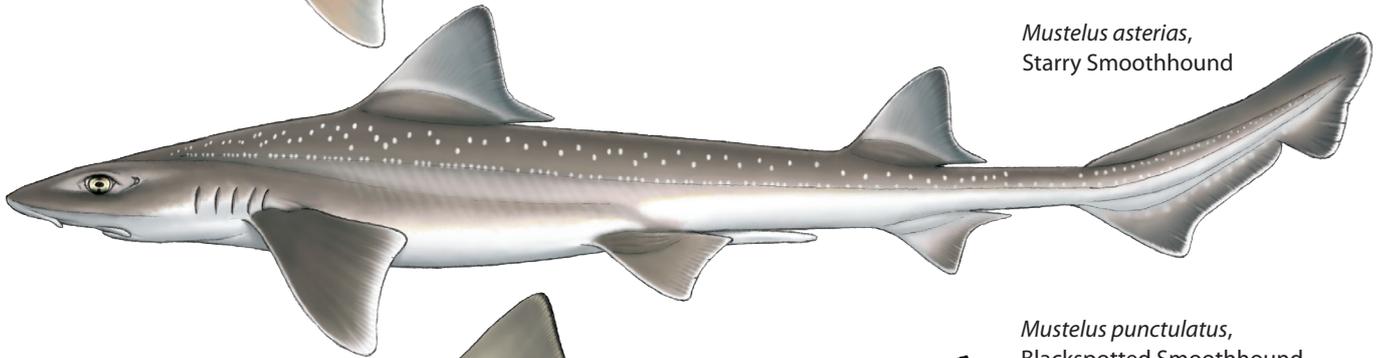
Galeorhinus galeus, Tope Shark

Squalus acanthias, Spiny Dogfish

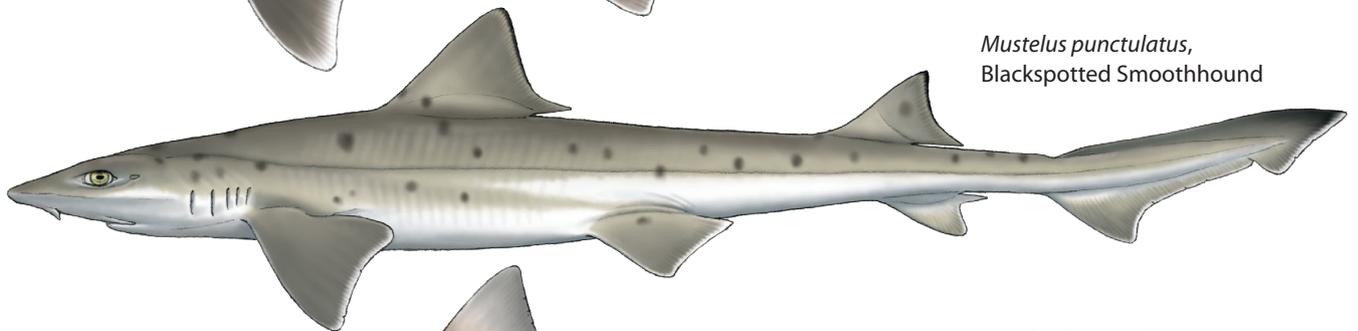
Mustelus mustelus,
Common Smoothhound



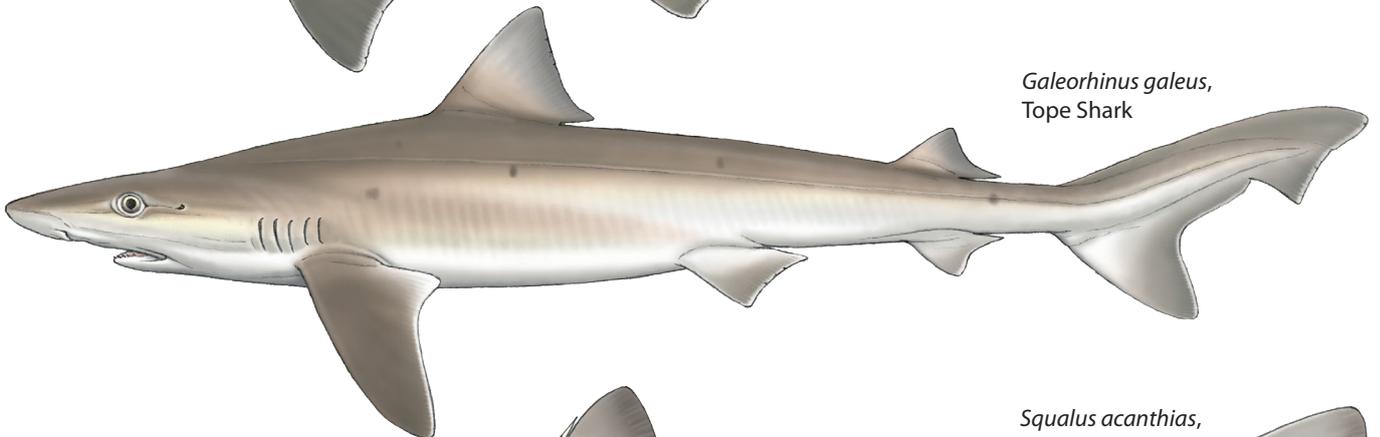
Mustelus asterias,
Starry Smoothhound



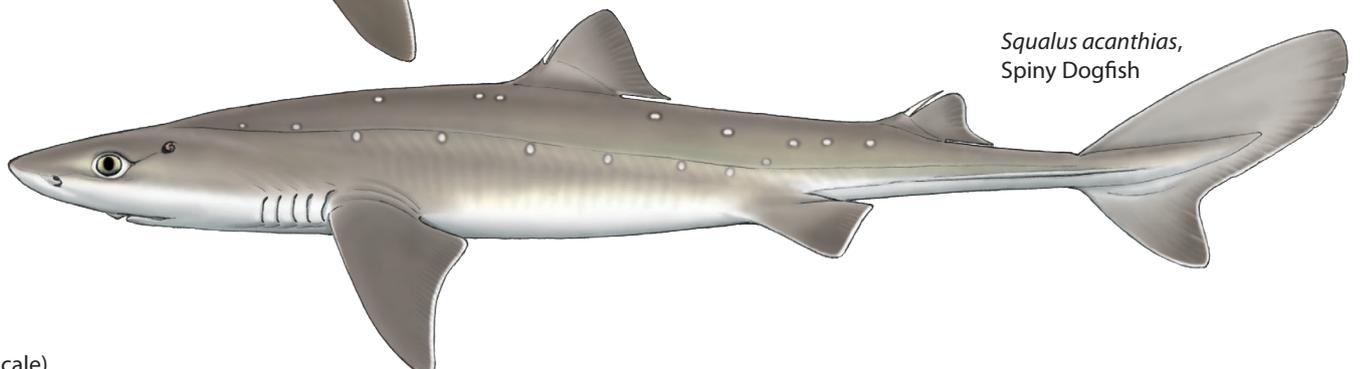
Mustelus punctulatus,
Blackspotted Smoothhound



Galeorhinus galeus,
Tope Shark



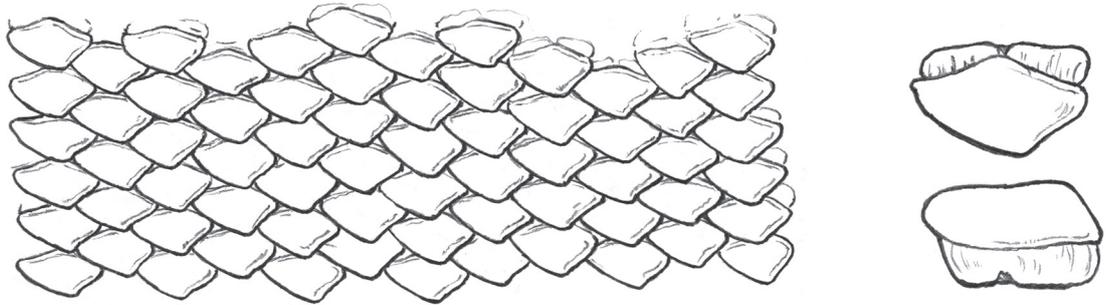
Squalus acanthias,
Spiny Dogfish



(Not to scale)

TEETH

The teeth are asymmetric with the cusps reduced to a low point. Very young individuals may have cusplets (Compagno, 1984). The tongue tip and extreme anterior palate are covered in buccopharyngeal denticles (Farrell *et al.*, 2009).



ECOLOGY AND BIOLOGY

HABITAT

The Common Smoothhound can be found to at least 350m on continental shelves and the uppermost slopes. It is most usually found on or near the bottom from 5–50m but can be found swimming mid-water (Compagno, 1984). It is predominantly an inshore species found around tidal flats, estuary mouths and in shallow bays with sandy, muddy or gravel substrate. It has been recorded offshore, often associated with sand banks and other topographical features (Fakhoury and Fergusson, Unknown).

EGGCASE

N/A

DIET

The most important prey items for the Common Smoothhound are benthic crustaceans including hermit and other crabs, lobster and shrimp. It also feeds on cephalopods and small bony fish (Fakhoury and Fergusson, Unknown). An individual caught at 300m had a mid-water fish (*Chlorophthalmus* spp.) in its stomach (Compagno, 1984).

REPRODUCTION

Male Common Smoothhounds mature around 70–74cm in length, females around 80cm. It is a viviparous species with a yolk sac placenta. After a gestation period of 10 to 11 months it gives birth to 4–15 young, each measuring around 39cm in length (Compagno, 1984).

COMMERCIAL IMPORTANCE

Smoothhound sharks are of little interest to fisheries in northern Europe. They are targeted throughout the Mediterranean however as their flesh is appreciated in southern Europe (Farrell et al., 2009). The Common Smoothhound is taken as bycatch in mixed species trawls, longline fisheries and occasional by pelagic fishers using trawls and driftnets. If landed in northern Europe, the flesh can be utilised fresh and frozen for human consumption (mainly in France and Germany), the liver can be processed for its oil and the carcass can be used for fishmeal (Compagno, 1984).

THREATS, CONSERVATION, LEGISLATION

The Common Smoothhound is a widespread although not abundant species. It is taken as bycatch in trawl and gillnet fisheries but there does not appear to be any immediate threat from overexploitation in the Atlantic (Ellis, 2000). In the Mediterranean, smoothhounds are targeted for their flesh so it could be under more intensive fishing pressure there (Aldebert, 1997). Catch trends should be monitored carefully to ascertain if it is being overexploited in this region.

IUCN RED LIST ASSESSMENT

Least Concern (2000).

HANDLING AND THORN ARRANGEMENT

- Handle with care.
- Sharp teeth and powerful jaws.
- Abrasive skin.

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Text: Richard Hurst.
Illustrations: Marc Dando.

Citation

Shark Trust; 2010. An Illustrated Compendium of Sharks, Skates, Rays and Chimaera. Chapter 1: The British Isles and Northeast Atlantic. Part 2: Sharks.

Any amendments or corrections, please contact:
The Shark Trust
4 Creykes Court, The Millfields
Plymouth, Devon PL1 3JB
Tel: 01752 672008/672020
Email: enquiries@sharktrust.org

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