

Blue lines indicate the area meeting the ISRA Criteria; dashed lines indicate the suggested buffer for use in the development of appropriate place-based conservation measures

CORNWALL ISRA

European Atlantic Region

SUMMARY

Cornwall is located on the southwest coast of England, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is situated between St. Ives on the northern coast and Gerrans Bay on the southern coast. This area is characterised by sandy beaches and muddy substrates, interspersed with rocky reefs, seagrass meadows, and kelp forests. The area is influenced by Atlantic Ocean currents in the north and the Gulf Stream in the south. Within this area there are: **threatened species** (e.g., Basking Shark *Cetorhinus maximus*); **reproductive areas** (Nursehound *Scyliorhinus stellaris*); and **undefined aggregations** (Basking Shark).

CRITERIA

Criterion A - Vulnerability; Sub-criterion C1 - Reproductive Areas; Sub-criterion C5 - Undefined Aggregations

— —
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
 — —

0-70 metres
 — —

801.3 km²
 — —





DESCRIPTION OF HABITAT

Cornwall is located on the southwest coast of England, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is situated between St. Ives on the northern coast and Gerrans Bay on the southern coast and encompasses the entire southern tip of England. The area includes various beaches and bays, including Castle Beach, Falmouth Bay, and Mounts Bay. The habitat is characterised by sandy beaches and muddy substrates, interspersed with rocky reefs, seagrass meadows, and kelp forests.

The northern part of this area is influenced by Atlantic Ocean currents while the southern part is exposed to the warmer English Channel, which is influenced by the Gulf Stream (Select Cornwall 2025).

This Important Shark and Ray Area is benthic and pelagic and is delineated from inshore and surface waters (0 m) to 70 m based on the bathymetry of the area.

ISRA CRITERIA

CRITERION A – VULNERABILITY

Two Qualifying Species considered threatened with extinction according to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species regularly occur in the area. These are the Endangered Basking Shark (Rigby et al. 2021) and the Vulnerable Nursehound (Finucci et al. 2021).

SUB-CRITERION C₁ – REPRODUCTIVE AREAS

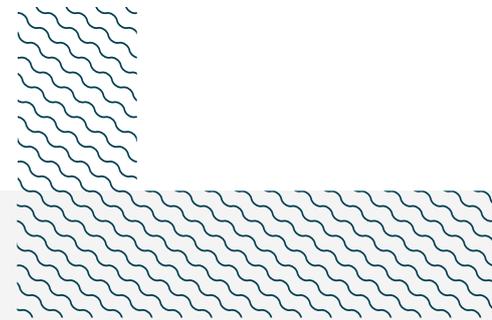
Cornwall is an important reproductive area for one shark species.

Opportunistic sightings of Nursehound egg cases are regularly and predictably reported from Falmouth Bay and Mounts Bay in this area by citizen scientists undertaking recreational snorkeling and diving activities (Shark Trust unpubl. data. 2025). No surveys dedicated to this purpose have been undertaken in this area, so records represent opportunistic sightings from the general public. These reports are compiled into a dedicated database, and egg case identification is confirmed through species-specific guides (Shark Trust unpubl. data. 2025). Overall, 162 *in-situ* Nursehound egg cases have been reported from 29 observations. These observations were recorded in 2013 (n = 1 record; n = 1 egg case), 2015 (n = 2 records; n = 2 egg cases), 2016 (n = 2 records; n = 4 egg cases), 2017 (n = 3 records; n = 4 egg cases), 2018 (n = 5 records; n = 100 egg cases), 2019 (n = 3 records; n = 5 egg cases), 2020 (n = 4 records; n = 4 egg cases), 2021 (n = 4 records; n = 27 egg cases), 2022 (n = 2 records; n = 8 egg cases), 2023 (n = 1 record; n = 1 egg case), and 2024 (n = 2 records; n = 6 egg cases) (Shark Trust unpubl. data. 2025). There is no apparent seasonality to these observations. Records are associated with the rocky reef habitat in the area. This is one of the largest known regular and predictable clusters of observations of *in situ* egg cases of this species within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. In addition, recreational snorkelers have opportunistically observed Nursehounds within this area and shared observations on social media. These Nursehounds were estimated at 20-120 cm total length (TL) during 2024-2025 (G Reale pers. obs. 2024-2025), some of which would have been young-of-year based on a published size-at-birth of 10-16 cm TL (Ebert et al. 2021).

SUB-CRITERION C5 - UNDEFINED AGGREGATIONS

Cornwall is an important area for undefined aggregations of one shark species.

Opportunistic land-based and vessel-based sightings reported by citizen scientists to the Shark Trusts' Basking Shark Project are collated into a dedicated database, with records since 1987 (Shark Trust unpubl. data 2025). Observations of three or more individuals reported at one time were extracted, and duplicate records were removed. Between 2010-2021, a total of 1,419 Basking Sharks were observed from 235 aggregations (Shark Trust unpubl. data 2025). The average number of aggregations per year in this period was 15, comprising an average of 6 individuals (maximum = 50 individuals in one aggregation). Aggregations have been reported from this area in 2010 (76 aggregations; 466 individuals), 2011 (3 aggregations; 11 individuals), 2012 (103 aggregations; 686 individuals), 2013 (39 aggregations; 206 individuals), 2014 (3 aggregations; 10 individuals), 2015 (4 aggregations; 14 individuals), 2016 (2 aggregations; 6 individuals), 2018 (1 aggregation; 3 individuals), 2020 (1 aggregation; 3 individuals), and 2021 (3 aggregations; 14 individuals). This is one of the locations in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland with the highest number of contemporary known citizen science reports of Basking Shark aggregations. This species may be aggregating in this area for feeding purposes based on direct observations by citizen scientists of animals feeding at the surface (Shark Trust unpubl. data 2025). Further information is required to understand the nature and function of these aggregations.



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QUALIFYING SPECIES

Scientific Name	Common Name	IUCN Red List Category	Global Depth Range (m)	ISRA Criteria/Sub-criteria Met							
				A	B	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	D1
SHARKS											
<i>Cetorhinus maximus</i>	Basking Shark	EN	0-1,504	X						X	
<i>Scyliorhinus stellaris</i>	Nursehound	VU	0-380	X		X					

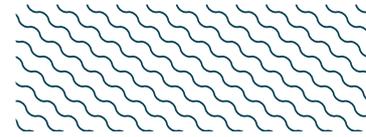
SUPPORTING SPECIES

Scientific Name	Common Name	IUCN Red List Category
SHARKS		
<i>Lamna nasus</i>	Porbeagle	VU
<i>Prionace glauca</i>	Blue Shark	NT
<i>Scyliorhinus canicula</i>	Smallspotted Catshark	LC
RAYS		
<i>Dasyatis pastinaca</i>	Common Stingray	VU

IUCN Red List of Threatened Species Categories are available by searching species names at www.iucnredlist.org. Abbreviations refer to: CR, Critically Endangered; EN, Endangered; VU, Vulnerable; NT, Near Threatened; LC, Least Concern; DD, Data Deficient.



SUPPORTING INFORMATION



There are additional indications that this area may be an important reproductive area for Porbeagle.

Contemporary species-specific commercial fishery catch data are unavailable since the fishery closed in 2010. However, the Porbeagle catch from the ICES statistical rectangle that encompasses this area contributed 36% of all Porbeagle landings (from target longline and gillnet bycatch) in southwest England. Since 2010, recreational anglers have been catching Porbeagle at early life stages (year-0) in most years, up to 12 miles off the south coast - between Penzance and Looe. Pregnant female Porbeagles are caught by recreational anglers on the north coast, from Lands End east to Hartland Point.

There are also additional indications that this area may be important for undefined aggregations of Nursehound.

Nursehounds aggregate year-round in the shallow waters of Falmouth, within this area. Recreational snorkelling guides and divers observed Nursehounds year-round during 2024-2025. These observations are concentrated around the kelp forest and seagrass meadows that characterise Castle Beach (G Reale pers. obs. 2025). The area is a well-known location by snorkelers for regular and predictable encounters with Nursehounds. Sightings of up to 10 individuals are common during a snorkel session of two hours (G Reale pers. obs. 2024-2025). Nursehounds are observed swimming, resting, and foraging to depths of 4 m (G Reale pers. obs. 2024-2025). One of the functions of these aggregations may be resting purposes, as aggregations of up to three Nursehounds have been observed resting on the substrate. Additional information is required to understand the nature and function of these aggregations.



REFERENCES

Ebert DA, Dando M, Fowler S. 2021. *Sharks of the world: A complete guide.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Finucci B, Derrick D, Pacoureau N. 2021. *Scyliorhinus stellaris.* *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* 2021: e.T161484A124493465. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2021-2.RLTS.T161484A124493465.en>

Rigby CL, Barreto R, Carlson J, Fernando D, Fordham S, Francis MP, Herman K, Jabado RW, Liu KM, Marshall A, et al. 2021. *Cetorhinus maximus* (amended version of 2019 assessment). *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* 2021: e.T4292A194720078. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2021-1.RLTS.T4292A194720078.en>

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