

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

## SOUTHWEST BRITTANY ISRA

### European Atlantic Region

#### SUMMARY

Southwest Brittany is located in the northwest of France. This split coastal area consists of a southern section around the Glénan Archipelago and Groix Island, and a northern section in the Iroise Sea around the Molène Archipelago and Ouessant (Ushant) Island. The habitat is characterised by rocky substrates, boulders, gravel, soft sediment substrates, and kelp forests. The area is influenced by strong tidal currents and tidal and thermal fronts. Within the area there are: **threatened species** and **feeding areas** (Basking Shark *Cetorhinus maximus*).

#### CRITERIA

**Criterion A - Vulnerability; Sub-criterion C2 - Feeding Areas**

FRANCE

0-90 metres

1,768.4 km<sup>2</sup>





## DESCRIPTION OF HABITAT

Southwest Brittany is located in northwestern France. This split coastal area consists of a southern section around the Glénan Archipelago and Groix Island, and a northern section in the Iroise Sea around the Molène Archipelago and Ouessant (Ushant) Island. The habitat is characterised by rocky substrates around the coast and islands, gravel, boulders, soft sediments such as coarse sand, sand, and mud, and one of Europe's largest kelp forests (Ehrhold et al. 2006; Bajjouk et al. 2015).

The area is influenced by strong currents driven by semi-diurnal tides, with current speeds of up to ~4 m/s (Sentchev et al. 2013). Currents are also driven by wind and density gradients (Rubio et al. 2013) and there is a strong residual circulation near the western coast with a permanent anticyclonic eddy located north of Ouessant Island (Sentchev et al. 2013). The water in this area is well-mixed compared to the thermally-stratified offshore waters of the Celtic Sea west of the Ushant Front (Le Boyer et al. 2009). These tidal and thermal fronts are thought to concentrate plankton in this area.

This Important Shark and Ray Area is pelagic and is delineated from inshore and surface waters (0 m) to 90 m based on the bathymetry of the area.

## ISRA CRITERIA

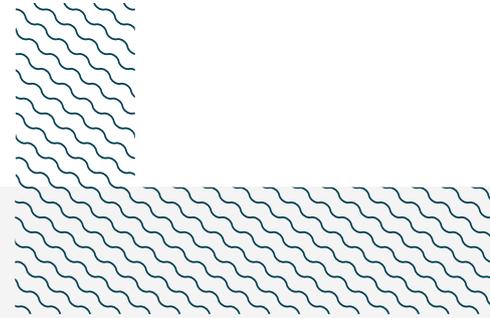
### CRITERION A - VULNERABILITY

One Qualifying Species considered threatened with extinction according to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species regularly occurs in the area. This is the Endangered Basking Shark (Rigby et al. 2021).

### SUB-CRITERION C2 - FEEDING AREAS

Southwest Brittany is an important feeding area for one shark species.

Basking Sharks are regularly seen feeding in this area, which is split into a southern section (Glénan Archipelago & Groix Island) and a northern section (Iroise Sea). Sightings of the species have been reported from the Atlantic Ocean and English Channel of France through a public sightings recording scheme between 1998–2024 (APECS 2020; APECS unpubl. data 2025). Of a total of 2,701 reports, 1,223 sightings (45.3%) were recorded in this area, with 906 sightings (33.5%) in the southern section and 317 sightings (11.7%) in the northern section. Additional sightings are also reported from within the buffer zone across this area, however, the two sections are the two main hotspots for the species in France. The behaviour of 572 individuals was reported from this area, and 88.1% of these (n = 504) noted feeding. This behaviour is characterised by Basking Sharks swimming at the surface with their mouth open and is easily identified from boat-based observations (APECS 2020). Sightings were concentrated in the boreal spring and summer. In the southern section, most sightings (86%) were made from April–June, with a peak in May. In the northern section, most observations (95%) were made between April–August. Feeding was recorded in all 27 years in this area. Size was visually estimated for 766 Basking Sharks (63% of total) and most of them were 300–600 cm total length (TL; 64%), with 22% in the 601–900 cm TL range, and 10% were <300 cm TL (APECS unpubl. data 2025). The size-at-maturity for the species is 750–800 cm TL (Ebert et al. 2021), indicating that a mix of juveniles and adults use this as a feeding area. Historically, Basking Sharks used to be fished in the 1950s–1990, particularly in Glénan in the southern section of the area, highlighting that this has long been an important area for the species (APECS 2020).



---

### **Acknowledgments**

Eric Stéphan (Association Pour l'Étude et la Conservation des Sélaciens - APECS), Alexandra Rohr (Association Pour l'Étude et la Conservation des Sélaciens - APECS), Armelle Jung (Des Requins et Des Hommes), and Christoph A Rohner (IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group - ISRA Project) contributed and consolidated information included in this factsheet. We thank all participants of the 2025 ISRA Region O2 - European Atlantic workshop for their contributions to this process.

This factsheet has undergone review by the ISRA Independent Review Panel prior to its publication.

This project was funded by the Shark Conservation Fund, a philanthropic collaborative pooling expertise and resources to meet the threats facing the world's sharks and rays. The Shark Conservation Fund is a project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors.

### **Suggested citation**

**IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group. 2025.** Southwest Brittany ISRA Factsheet. Dubai: IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group.

## 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	D2	
<b>SHARKS</b>													
<i>Cetorhinus maximus</i>	Basking Shark	EN	0-1,504	X			X						

## SUPPORTING SPECIES

Scientific Name	Common Name	IUCN Red List Category
<b>SHARKS</b>		
<i>Lamna nasus</i>	Porbeagle	VU
<i>Mustelus asterias</i>	Starry Smoothhound	NT
<i>Prionace glauca</i>	Blue Shark	NT
<i>Scyliorhinus canicula</i>	Smallspotted Catshark	LC
<i>Scyliorhinus stellaris</i>	Nursehound	VU
<i>Squalus acanthias</i>	Spiny Dogfish	VU
<b>RAYS</b>		
<i>Raja brachyura</i>	Blonde Skate	NT
<i>Raja clavata</i>	Thornback Skate	NT
<i>Raja microocellata</i>	Small-eyed Skate	NT
<i>Raja montagui</i>	Spotted Skate	LC
<i>Raja undulata</i>	Undulate Skate	NT
<i>Torpedo marmorata</i>	Marbled Torpedo Ray	VU

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





## REFERENCES

**Association Pour l'Étude et la Conservation des Sélaciens (APECS). 2020.** Les observations de requins pèlerins en France métropolitaine de 1998 à 2017. 20 ans de données collectées dans le cadre du programme national de recensement des observations. Brest: Association Pour l'Étude et la Conservation des Sélaciens.

**Bajjouk T, Rochette S, Laurans M, Ehrhold A, Hamdi A, Le Niliot P. 2015.** Multi-approach mapping to help spatial planning and management of the kelp species *L. digitata* and *L. hyperborea*: Case study of the Molène Archipelago, Brittany. *Journal of Sea Research* 100: 2-21. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.seares.2015.04.004>

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

**Ehrhold A, Blanchet A, Hamon D. 2006.** Réseau de surveillance benthique (REBENT) – Région Bretagne. Approche sectorielle subtidale: Identification et caractérisation des habitats benthiques du secteur Glénan. Brest: Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer (Ifremer).

**Le Boyer A, Cambon G, Daniault N, Herbette S, Le Cann B, Marié L, Morin P. 2009.** Observations of the Ushant tidal front in September 2007. *Continental Shelf Research* 29: 1026-1037. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.csr.2008.12.020>

**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>

**Rubio A, Fontán A, Lazure P, González M, Valencia V, Ferrer L, Mader J, Hernández C. 2013.** Seasonal to tidal variability of currents and temperature in waters of the continental slope, southeastern Bay of Biscay. *Journal of Marine Systems* 109-110: 121-133. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmarsys.2012.01.004>

**Sentchev A, Forget P, Barbin Y, Yaremchuck M. 2013.** Surface circulation in the Iroise Sea (W. Brittany) from high resolution HF radar mapping. *Journal of Marine Systems* 109-110: 153-168. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmarsys.2011.11.024>