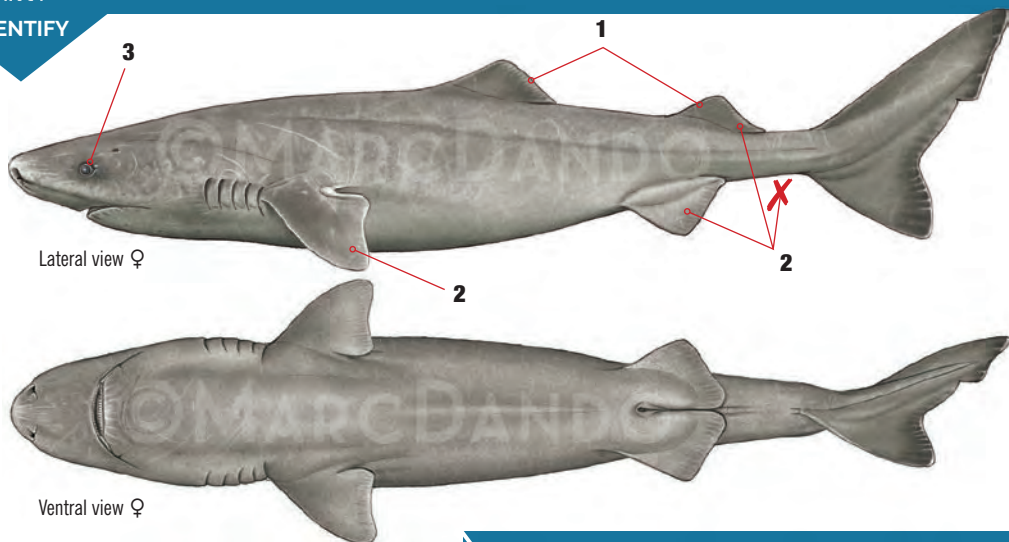


GREENLAND SHARK

Somniosus microcephalus

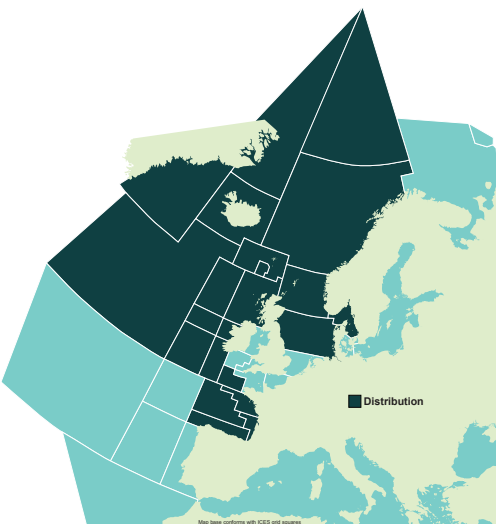


SCIENTIFIC NAME

Somniosus microcephalus (Bloch & Schneider, 1801)

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic to the North Atlantic and Arctic. Eastern Arctic and Atlantic from Russia and Norway to the North Sea and Ireland; occasionally recorded further south to Portugal.¹⁻⁴



COMMON NAMES

GREENLAND SHARK, Sleeper Shark, Large Sleeper Shark, Ground Shark, Eishai (DEU), Tiburón Boreal (ESP), Laimargue du Groenland (FRA), Squalo di Groenlandia (ITA), Groenlandse Haai (NLD), Tubarão-da-gronelândia (PRT).

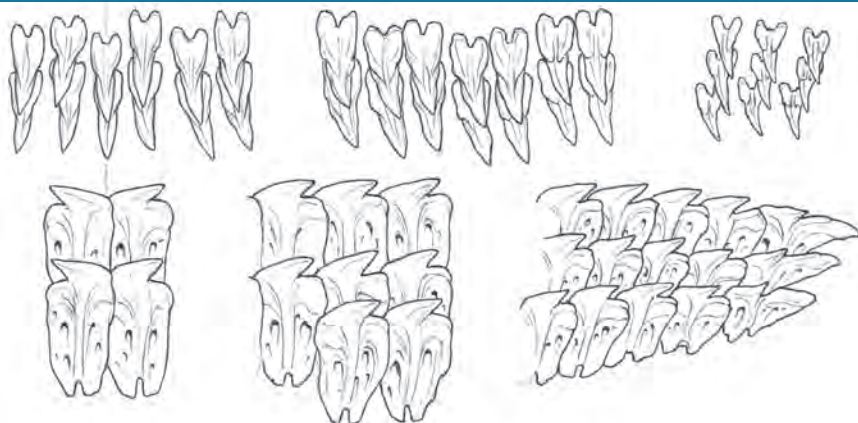
IDENTIFICATION AND COLOUR

- 1 Heavily cylindrical body with two, spineless dorsal fins.^{2,3,5}
 - 2 All precaudal fins small, no anal fin.^{2,3,5}
 - 3 Small eyes, commonly with visible copepod attached.^{2,3,5,6}
- Uniform grey to medium brown.^{2,3,5}
 - Sometimes with pattern of small dark and light spots/blotches; transverse dark bands can also be visible.^{2,3,5}

SIZE AND BIOLOGY

- Birth: 40–50cm.
- Matures: female 450cm; male 300cm.
- Max. TL: 640cm, possibly to 730cm.²
- Age at maturity: est. ~150 years (female). Max. age: suggested to be ≤400 years. Very slow growing.⁷
- Viviparous, avg. of 7–10 pups per litter.²
- Generalist feeder, diet includes fishes, cephalopods and crustaceans. Marine mammals often taken; unclear whether these are scavenged or actively targeted.^{2,3,5}
- The copepod *Ommatokoila elongata* present on the cornea of most Greenland Sharks' eyes causes serious damage to the eye (incl. blindness). It does not seem to affect movements or ability to locate prey.^{2,3,5,6}

TEETH



- ▶ Upper jaw: 35–39; thin, sharp and lacking serrations.^{2,3}
- ▶ Lower jaw: 45–57; interlocking, broad and square with short, smooth cusps.^{2,3}

SIMILAR SPECIES



Little Sleeper Shark *Somniosus rostratus*



Bluntnose Sixgill Shark *Hexanchus griseus*

HABITAT

- ▶ Demersal to pelagic on continental and insular shelves and upper slopes; shallows to 1,400m, possibly to 2,647m.²
- ▶ Prefers water temperature 0.6–12°C; majority of records from waters <5°C.^{3,4}
- ▶ Known to make large-scale (100–1000km) movements throughout the year. Migrates inshore during colder months at high latitudes. This behaviour is reversed at lower latitudes.^{2,5,8}

CONSERVATION STATUS*

- ▶ IUCN Red List: Global: Near Threatened (2006)
Europe: Near Threatened (2015)
- ▶ Life history and population structure remains poorly known. This shark's longevity and exceptionally slow growth coupled with possible historic population decline make it vulnerable to fishing pressure.¹

COMMERCIAL IMPORTANCE

- ▶ Historically targeted for its liver oil by large-scale industrial fisheries in Norway, Iceland and Greenland.⁴
- ▶ Occasional bycatch in longline, trawl and gillnet fisheries; usually discarded.¹
- ▶ Targeted by artisanal fishers in Iceland and Greenland who utilise the meat, skin and teeth.^{1–3}
- ▶ Meat is toxic when fresh but eaten in some countries after being washed and cured. Hákarl, made from fermented Greenland Shark meat, is a traditional dish in Iceland.^{1,4,8}

MANAGEMENT*

- ▶ Subject to prohibitions under the CFP, RFMO and FNA regulations.

REFERENCES

- 1 Burgess *et al.* 2015.
- 2 Ebert *et al.* 2013.
- 3 Ebert & Stehmann. 2013.
- 4 ICES WGEF Report. 2017.
- 5 MacNeil *et al.* 2012.
- 6 Ferrando *et al.* 2016.
- 7 Nielsen *et al.* 2016.
- 8 Campana *et al.* 2015.
- 9 Davis *et al.* 2013.