

## Hunting for eggcases of sharks and rays along the Belgian coast

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Many elasmobranchs (sharks and rays) are oviparous and reproduce by laying eggs. These eggcases are tough leathery capsules that protect the embryo as it develops inside. After several months they are ready to hatch, and a fully-formed shark or skate emerges. Through yearly organized citizen science projects, referred to as “eggcase hunts”, volunteers from various countries join efforts to search for shark and ray eggcases along the beaches. These “eggcase hunts” deliver important scientific insights into the geographical distribution, population size and reproduction of elasmobranchs, but have not been organized in Belgium yet. To expand our knowledge on eggcases along the Belgian shores, this project aims to bring together different data sources: 1) historical data from local volunteer organizations (e.g. “Strandwerkgroep”), 2) online records ([www.waarnemingen.be](http://www.waarnemingen.be)), 3) recent data collected by a student along specific transects, 4) recent findings reported to us by local volunteers. Volunteers are encouraged to look for eggcases along the Belgian coast and to report these to ILVO and/or upload the data online ([www.waarnemingen.be](http://www.waarnemingen.be)). Using these data sources, spatial maps and qualitative analyses will allow us to identify “hotspot” locations along the Belgian coast. We aim to explore seasonal relationships and weather conditions on the number of recordings as well. In summary, this study aims to provide a baseline of knowledge and tools to continue this as a citizen-science project in the future.

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