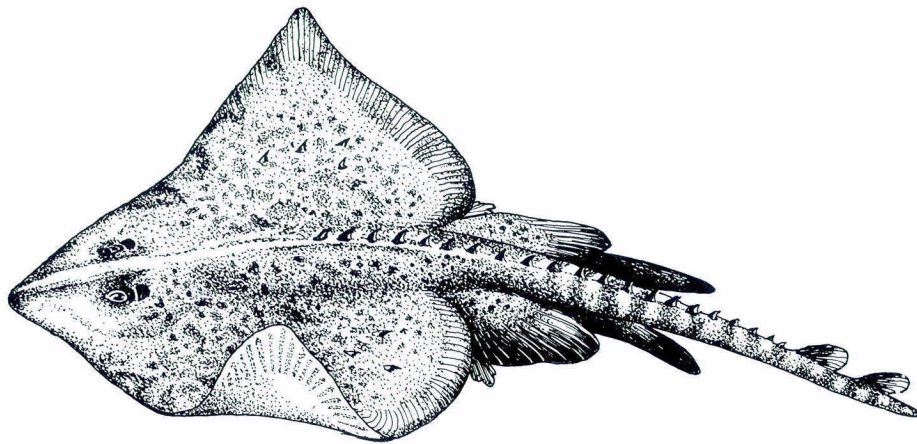




# MANX SEA FISHING

12

SOME FISH, MOLLUSCS & CRUSTACEANS  
OF MANX WATERS I-Z



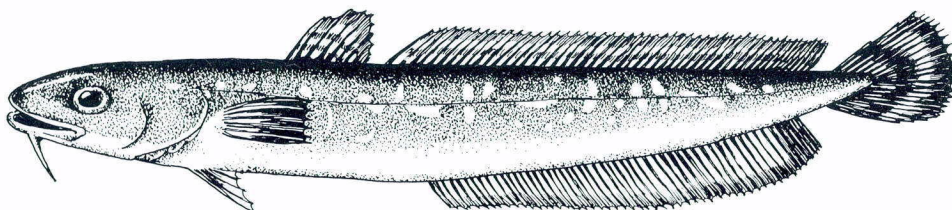
Thornback Ray.

Names given in brackets are Manx Gaelic.

**LIMPET** (Barnagh) – commonly known as ‘Flitters’. They were a traditional Good Friday breakfast.

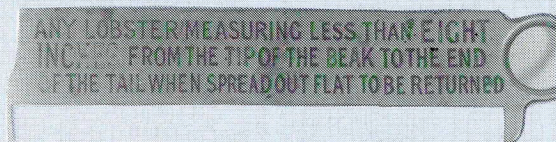
**LING** – The immature fish are known in Manx as ‘Donnag’. Ling are long, grey, eel-like fish, up to 2 metres in length. They are fished principally in summer, since the breeding females spend the winter in burrows. They are members of the cod family. They

tend to live in areas of considerable water movement such as rocky places or around wrecks. They have a single barbel, or ‘beard’, which is held straight forward when they are sensing the water ahead. Mature ling have brownish bands down the side and blackish bands round the body. Weights of 14 – 18 kg are not unusual in large specimens. Richard Townley, describing Manx fishing in 1791, spoke of “vast quantities of cod, whiting, pollock, ling and haddock”.



Ling.





A Lobster Measurer.

**LOBSTER** (Gimmagh) – An immature lobster was called a “Parick”. A Manx proverb, making the point that small items add up, says “Ta daa pharick jannoo un ghimmagh”, or “Two young lobsters make one (adult) lobster”. Lobsters were fished between April and August. At this time of year they came from deep water into rock crannies to grow a new ‘shell’. Traditional lobster pots were described in 1849 as “creels of osier, black sally, and the currant tree”. Bollans were used as bait.

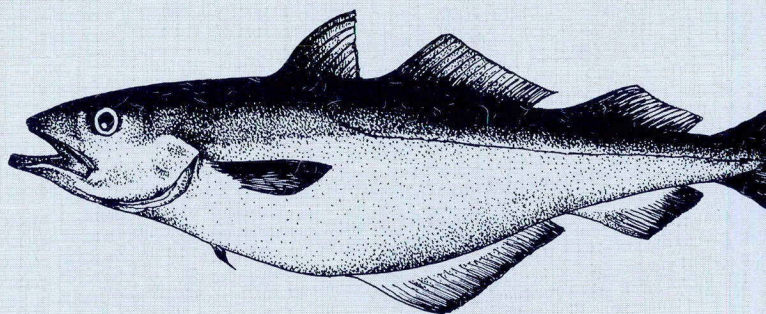
**MACKEREL** (Breck Marrey) – The Manx name means “speckled/spotted one of the sea”. When a mackerel was dead it was said to be properly caught if it could be held rigid by the tail; if it sagged it was believed to have been drowned. Mackerel were the Kinsale catch sought by Manxmen in the spring of the year. Mackerel approach the British Isles from deep Atlantic waters in spring, to spawn during the May – June period.

According to Manx tradition mackerel, lobster and seal are the three fastest creatures in the sea.

**GREY MULLET** (Mullard) – a nearly cylindrical fish. It was often caught with nets off the beach.

**OYSTER** (Ooastyr) – Beds of oysters were dredged north of Maughold Head; also between Port Mooar and Laxey.

**PLAICE/Fluke** (Liehbage Vreck) The ‘vreck’ = spot in its Manx name refers to its orange red-spots. To-day they are caught by otter trawlers and beam trawlers. In the past they were also caught with hooks and lines, seine nets and stake nets. Peel and Port Erin were once centres for plaice fishing between November and May. Sand and gravel beds are their favourite haunts and they often cover themselves with sediment so avoiding detection. According to Manx folk lore, when the fluke heard that the herring had been chosen king of the sea, he curled his mouth on one side, saying: “A simple fish like the herring king of the sea!” – and his mouth has been on one side ever since.



Pollack.

**POLLOCK/Lythe** (Callig/Keeileg) – A member of the cod family, with long narrow jaw. They resemble whiting but are brass-coloured. Pollock used to be caught mainly with lines. Port Erin and Bay Stacka near the Sugar Loaf were some of the favourite areas.

**QUEENIES/Queen Scallops/Queens** (Roagan). – These are smaller in size than the Scallop and have a much shorter lifespan. They grow large enough for sale in 14 to 18 months. Queenies can live on harder parts of the sea bed than the Scallop as they do not hollow out a resting place like their larger relation. Queenies were once used as bait by line fishermen, and were not generally used as food until 1969.

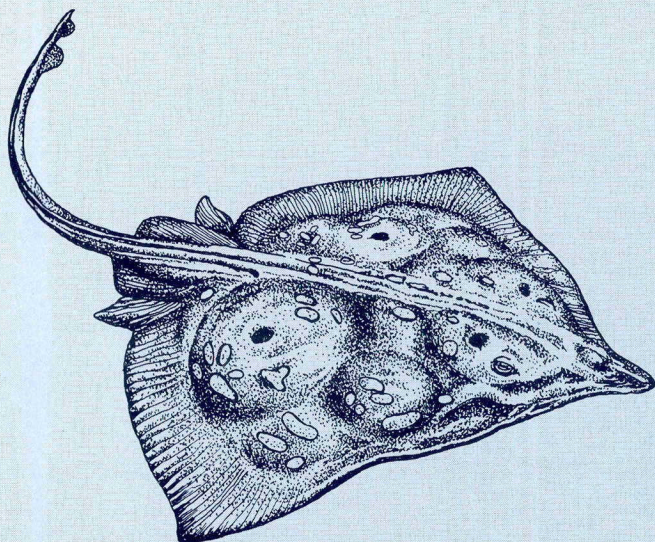
**RAY** (Scarrag) – This is a flat-bodied fish, with a skeleton of cartilage (like dogfish, skates and sharks). Rays and skates are very similar. Both are kite-shaped and both have rectangular egg-cases with long horns at each corner for attachment to weeds and stones. Both feed on crabs and molluscs. The rays have short blunt snouts, whilst skates have pointed snouts. Rays, like skate, migrate in-shore towards the end of summer and were an important part of the catch for longline fishermen operating on the Bahama Bank in Ramsey Bay. Rays are at present more common in the south Irish Sea than around the Isle of Man.

**SAND EEL** (Gibbin) – Not true eels, but slim, silver and elongated in shape like eels. They are very popular food with seabirds such as puffins, terns and kittiwakes. (The tern is ‘Gant Gibbin’, or ‘Gibbin Gannet’ in Manx).

**SCALLOP/Giant Scallop/Edible Scallop/King Scallop** (Roagan) – Both queenies and scallops belong to the bivalve mollusc family. The names are rather confusing as queenies are also scallops! The scallop’s Latin name is *Pecten maximus*, meaning ‘very large comb’



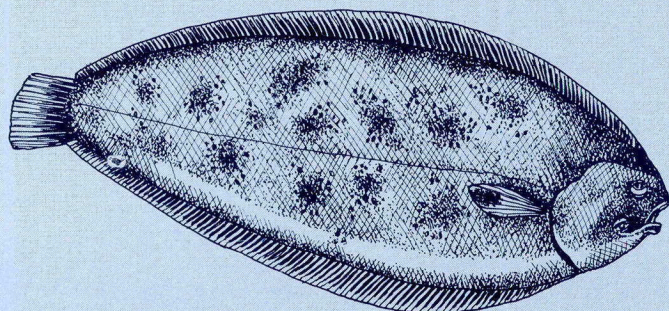
Scallop fishing began in the Isle of Man in 1937 and dredges are used. In olden days the shells of scallops were used as crockery. The flat shell was known in Manx at the "moggaidd" (= plate) and the round shell as "curjeig" (= dish). A "tan roagan" was the rounded half filled with fish oil or lard in which a wick of rush pith or linen was placed to act as a lamp.



Skate.

**SKATE** (Scarrag) See Ray above also. Skate was once the principal fish caught by the Ramsey longline fishermen in autumn. It was caught on the same grounds as the ray. By 1940 Douglas was the main centre. Today skates are practically absent from Manx waters. A large skate including the 'wings' might be 1.5 m across.

The Long Nosed Skate was known in Manx as 'Peegagh'.



Sole.

**SOLE** (Liehbaig) – Dover Sole and Lemon Sole are minor fish in terms of catches landed on the Island. Beam trawlers and, to a lesser extent, otter trawlers both catch sole. South west of the Isle of Man, together with Morecambe & Liverpool Bays are the areas where most catches are made. Soles, like all flatfish, change colour to blend with the sea bed.

**SPURDOGS** (Scoargagh or Peegagh Breck) There is increasing demand for this type of dogfish. They can be caught with longlines, drift nets or trawls. They are long-lived fish which mature late and may soon become over-fished as they do not produce great quantities of spawn.

**WHITING** (Fynag) – The Manx name, like the English, refers to the white colour of this fish. This small relation of the cod grows up to about 30cm in length and weighs on average around a kilogram. They prefer areas with a sandy bottom and spawn between March and May. Today they are over-fished and large quantities of small whiting are discarded by Nephrops ("scampi") trawlers. Today they are caught by otter and pelagic trawls.