

VELVET BELLY LANTERN SHARK (*Etmopterus spinax*)

The name “velvet belly” refers to the distinctive and abrupt black pattern on its underside, which is home to thousands of special cells called “photophores” or light cells.

One of the most common deep-water sharks found throughout the Atlantic Ocean, this shark is typically found between depths of 200-700 m (656-2297 ft).

The photophores are able to produce light in a process called bioluminescence and help camouflage the shark from light shining down from above. This process is called counter-illumination.

In the Northeast Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea these populations separate by age. Generally juveniles are found at shallow depths and mature adults in deeper waters.

The velvet belly is accidentally caught in high numbers in many deep-sea trawl fisheries. Due to its small size it is usually just discarded, which makes it difficult to assess the impact of the fishing industry on the population of this species.

