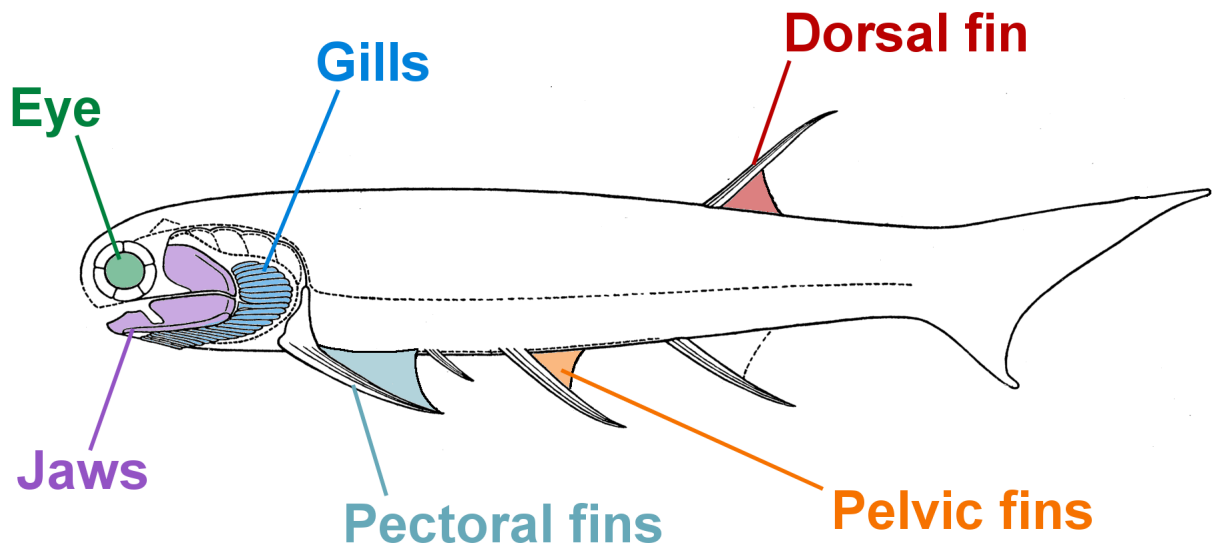


Mesacanthus

me-sa-can-thus

Mesacanthus is a “**spiny shark**”, or acanthodian fish, from Scotland, with bony spines in front of each fin and tiny, shark-like scales. It was one of the **earliest relatives of living sharks**, and like all of our fishes it lived in the **Devonian** period, between 420 and 360 million years ago. It had no teeth, and instead would have fed by **filtering plankton** out of the water with its sieve-like gills. *Mesacanthus* was one of the **smallest** acanthodians (2-15cm) and would have been eaten by bigger fishes, including other spiny sharks like *Ischnacanthus* - the coprolite (fossil poo) on the table is probably mainly made up of lots of tiny digested *Mesacanthus*.



Fossil facts

- We have *Mesacanthus* from **two different places** in Scotland: Tillywhandland Quarry near Dundee, and Achanarras Quarry near Thurso. You can tell this from the different colours of the rock they're in.
- As you can see *Mesacanthus* was **really small in comparison to some of the other fishes of the time** (look at our smallest one!). It probably had a role in the ecosystem similar to small, filter-feeding fishes today, unlike living sharks which are all quite big (can you think of any goldfish sized sharks?).