

## Our Coasts



Britain's ever-changing coastline is swarming with wildlife that live through the often harsh and unpredictable conditions that the UK's beaches, peninsulas, sea lochs, bays and estuaries can offer. Let's delve into the fact files and examine some of the wonderful creatures that call our coasts home.

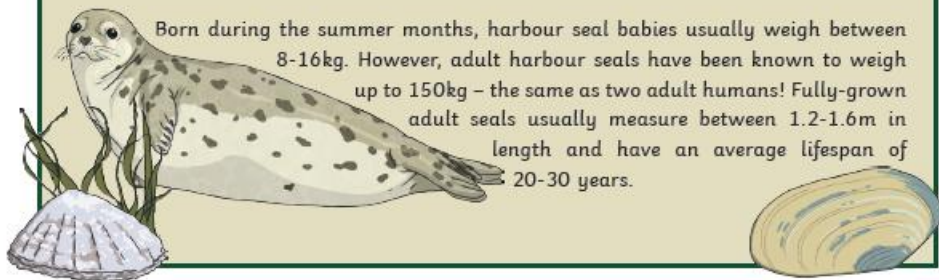
### Harbour Seal

**Scientific Name:** *Phoca vitulina*

The harbour seal is also known as the common seal. It is one of two species of seal which are common in British waters – the other being the grey seal. It is simple to spot harbour seals due to their distinctive appearance; they have grey or brown fur covered with a fine, spotted pattern.

Harbour seals can be spotted throughout the year around the coasts of Scotland, Northern Ireland and eastern England. Like all seals, harbour seals live both on land and in the water. However, they prefer the safety of sheltered shores and estuaries, hauling themselves onto sandbanks and beaches. They are known to eat a wide variety of fish, including herring, eels and flatfish, with the occasional shrimp or squid.

Born during the summer months, harbour seal babies usually weigh between 8-16kg. However, adult harbour seals have been known to weigh up to 150kg – the same as two adult humans! Fully-grown adult seals usually measure between 1.2-1.6m in length and have an average lifespan of 20-30 years.



## Our Coasts

### Oystercatcher

**Scientific Name:** *Haematopus ostralegus*

The oystercatcher is a large and stocky bird, which is resident on Britain's coastline all year round. It is unmistakable in appearance with its bold black and white feathers, a long, powerful orange-red bill and reddish-pink legs.

Unsurprisingly, given their name, oystercatchers specialise in eating the shellfish available on Britain's coastline, such as oysters, cockles and mussels. They prise them open using their strong, flattened bills. Originally living solely on the coast, these incredibly noisy birds have recently been seen moving further inland to breed on lakes and waterways.

However, during winter, large numbers can be seen gathering in major coastal estuaries, which are rich in cockles, such as Morecambe Bay.



Oystercatchers usually grow to between 40-45cm in length and have a wingspan of between 80-86cm. They usually weigh between 430-650g and have an average lifespan of around 12 years.



### Common Hermit Crab

**Scientific Name:** *Pagurus bernhardus*

The common hermit crab calls the cold waters of Northern Europe home; they can be found living in the waters around all of the British Isles. Preferring to live around rocky and mixed seabeds, the common hermit crab is often spotted by nature fans having fun in a rock pool.

Interestingly, this crafty creature does not have a hard shell of its own to protect it from predators. Instead, it must find and use the shell of another creature. Due to this, the common hermit crab has a soft, twisted body, which has evolved to allow it to fit into shells of many different shapes and sizes. Common hermit crabs are usually reddish-orange in colour but brown and even purple hermit crabs have been seen.

When threatened, the common hermit crab can completely retreat into its shell, blocking the entrance with its claws.

The common hermit crab becomes an adult at just one year of age and usually lives a maximum of 10 years. The overall size of the common hermit crab depends upon the shell it lives in but they have an average body length of just 8cm.



## Why Not Go for a Dip?

Rock pooling is a fun activity and can be a great chance to explore the different creatures that share a home on Britain's coastline. All you need is:

- a small fishing net or sieve;
  - a bucket;
  - a Rock Pooling Identification Checklist.
1. It is best to go rock pooling when the weather is dry and calm (late spring to early autumn affords the best conditions). Always stay safe and warm when rock pooling. Wear shoes with a good grip, such as old trainers or wellies with a thick sole. Take a jumper or coat with you – the British coastline can be quite chilly!
  2. Get an adult to fill your bucket with water from a rock pool.
  3. Carefully, lower your net or sieve into the rock pool. Move it slowly through the water.
  4. Gently lift out your net. Turn it over onto your bucket. Use the checklist to find out what you have caught. **Remember:** Look but never touch.
  5. When you have finished, get an adult to slowly pour the creatures from the bucket back into the rock pool.

It is very important to keep yourself safe near water. You should **always** go rock pooling with an adult to look after you.



It is also very important for your supervising adult to check on the tide times so that you don't get caught out by quickly moving tides.

# Questions

1. Which of these is the scientific name for the Harbour Seal? Tick one.

- Haematopus ostralegus  
 Phoca vitulina  
 Pagurus bernhardus  
 Delphinus delphis

2. Join the boxes to match each creature to its average length.

Oystercatcher	8cm
Harbour Seal	40-45cm
Common Hermit Crab	1.2-1.6m

3. Find and copy two adjectives the author uses in the first paragraph to describe the conditions along the British coastline.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

4. Fill in the missing words.

It is one of \_\_\_\_\_ species of seal which are common in \_\_\_\_\_ waters  
 – the other being the \_\_\_\_\_ seal.

5. List two items that the text encourages you to take with you if you are rock pooling.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

6. Explain what you think would happen if the common hermit crab was unable to find a disused shell.

---



---



---

7. Give your opinion on why oystercatchers may have moved inland to breed over recent years.

---



---



---

8. Fully explain how the common hermit crab protects itself from predators.

---



---



---

9. ...with the occasional shrimp or squid.

Why do you think that the harbour seal only eats shrimp and squid **occasionally**?

---



---



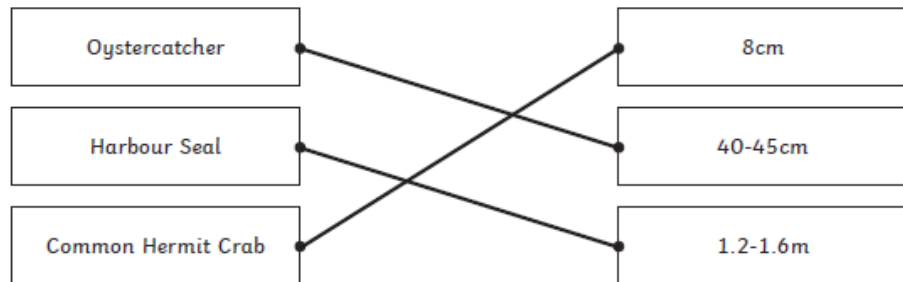
---

# Answers

1. Which of these is the scientific name for the Harbour Seal? Tick one.

- Haematopus ostralegus
- Phoca vitulina**
- Pagurus bernhardus
- Delphinus delphis

2. Join the boxes to match each creature to its average length.



3. Find and copy two adjectives the author uses in the first paragraph to describe the conditions along the British coastline.

**harsh**  
**unpredictable**

4. Fill in the missing words.

It is one of **two** species of seal which are common in **British** waters – the other being the **grey** seal.

5. List two items that the text encourages you to take with you if you are rock pooling.

**Accept any two of the following: fishing net or sieve; bucket; Rock Pooling Identification Checklist; shoes with a good grip; old trainers; wellies; jumper; coat.**

6. Explain what you think would happen if the common hermit crab was unable to find a disused shell.

**Pupils' own responses, such as: Without a shell to live in, the common hermit crab is likely to be eaten by predators because it does not have a way to protect itself.**

7. Give your opinion on why oystercatchers may have moved inland to breed over recent years.  
**Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that oystercatchers may have moved inland to breed because lots of people drop litter inland and food for their babies may be easier to find.**

8. Fully explain how the common hermit crab protects itself from predators.

**Pupils' own responses, such as: The common hermit crab protects itself from predators by living inside disused shells. When it senses that an attack from a predator is coming, it retreats into the shell and uses its claws to block the entrance.**

9. ...with the occasional shrimp or squid.

Why do you think that the harbour seal only eats shrimp and squid **occasionally**?

**Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that the harbour seal only eats shrimp and squid occasionally because they are hard to find in the places that the seal chooses to live.**