

# Our Coasts



Britain's coastline is full with wildlife that live through the harsh weather that the UK's beaches, peninsulas, sea lochs, bays and estuaries can often offer. Let's jump into the fact files and look at some of the wonderful creatures that call our coasts home.

## Harbour Seal

**Average mass: 60-150kg**

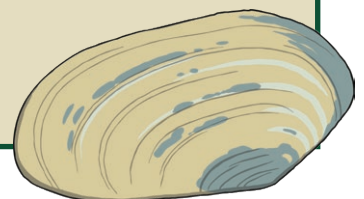
**Average length: 1.2-1.6m**

**Average lifespan: 20-30 years**



The harbour seal is also known as the common seal. Harbour seals are easy to spot because of their distinctive appearance. They have grey or brown fur which is covered with a fine, spotted pattern.

Harbour seals can be seen all year long around the coasts of Scotland, Northern Ireland and eastern England. Like all seals, harbour seals live both on land and in the water. They prefer the safety of sheltered shores and estuaries so they drag themselves onto sandbanks and beaches. They eat lots of different types of fish, including herring, eels and flatfish. Sometimes, they even eat shrimp or squid.



## Oystercatcher

**Average mass: 430-650g**

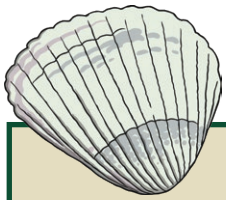
**Average length: 40-45cm**

**Average wingspan: 80-86cm**

**Average lifespan: 12 years**

The oystercatcher is a large and noisy bird, which lives on Britain's coastline all year round. It has bold black and white feathers, a long, powerful orange-red bill and reddish-pink legs.

Oystercatchers love to eat the shellfish found on Britain's coastline, such as oysters, cockles and mussels. They force them open using their strong, flattened bills. Although they used to live solely on the coast, oystercatchers have recently been seen moving further inland to breed on lakes and waterways. However, large numbers can be seen gathering in major coastal estuaries during winter.



## Common Hermit Crab

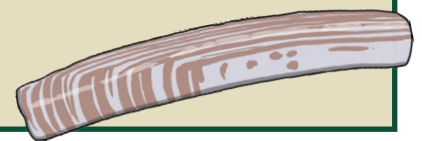
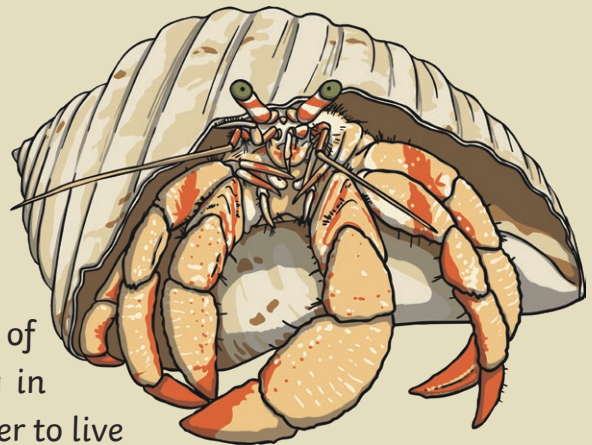
**Average mass: 7g**

**Average length: 8cm**

**Average lifespan: 1-10 years**

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. They prefer to live around rocky seabeds and can often be spotted in rock pools.

Interestingly, this crafty creature does not have a hard shell of its own. Instead, it must find and use the shell of another creature. So that it can fit into lots of different shells, the common hermit crab has a soft, twisted body. When it feels threatened, the hermit crab can go completely into its shell and block the entrance with its claws.





## 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, such as between late spring and early autumn. 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 two of these items does the first instruction recommend taking with you when rock pooling? Tick two.

- shoes with good grip
- a warm jumper
- a tent with strong poles
- a large umbrella

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

Oystercatcher

Harbour Seal

Common Hermit Crab

1-10 years

12 years

20-30 years

3. Fill in the missing words.

The common hermit crab calls the \_\_\_\_\_ waters of \_\_\_\_\_ Europe home.

4. List two sea creatures eaten by the harbour seal.

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

5. Find and copy two adjectives used to describe the oystercatcher.

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

6. **...get an adult to slowly pour the creatures from the bucket back into the rock pool.**  
Explain why this is an important step.

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7. Why do you think that it is important for the common hermit crab to find a disused shell?

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8. Which of these creatures would you most like to see at the coast?  
Give a reason for your choice.

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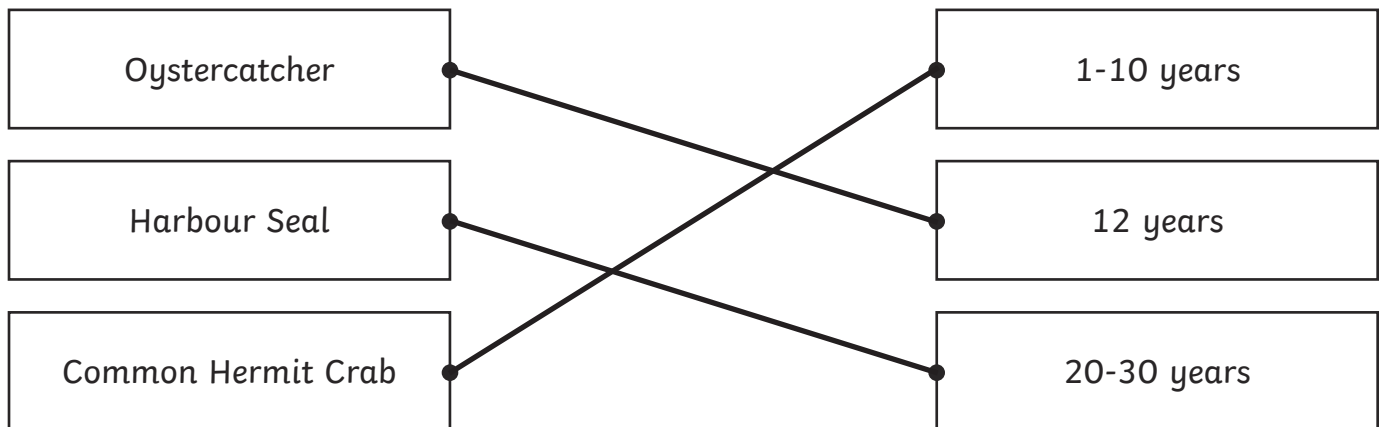
# Answers

1. Which two of these items does the first instruction recommend taking with you when rock pooling? Tick two.

**shoes with good grip**

- a warm jumper
- a tent with strong poles
- a large umbrella

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



3. Fill in the missing words.

The common hermit crab calls the **cold** waters of **Northern** Europe home.

4. List two sea creatures eaten by the harbour seal.

**Accept any two of the following: herring; eels; flatfish; shrimp; squid.**

5. Find and copy two adjectives used to describe the oystercatcher.

**large, noisy.**

6. **...get an adult to slowly pour the creatures from the bucket back into the rock pool.**

Explain why this is an important step.

**Pupils' own responses, such as: It is important to put the creatures back into the rock pool so that they are returned to their natural habitat and can continue to survive.**

7. Why do you think that it is important for the common hermit crab to find a disused shell?

**Pupils' own responses, such as: It is important for the common hermit crab to find a disused shell because it needs a shell in order to protect itself from predators. Without one, it is likely to be eaten.**

8. Which of these creatures would you most like to see at the coast?

Give a reason for your choice.

**Pupils' own responses, such as: I would most like to see a harbour seal because I have never seen one before and I would like to look at the pattern on their fur.**

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.**