

Our Coasts



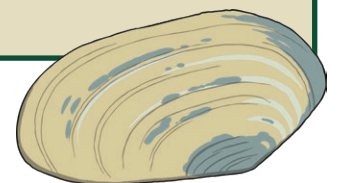
Britain's ever-evolving coastline is teeming with wildlife that withstand the often harsh and unpredictable conditions that the UK's beaches, peninsulas, sea lochs, bays and estuaries can offer. Let's delve into the fact files and examine some of the magnificent creatures that call our coasts home.

Harbour Seal Scientific Name: *Phoca vitulina*

The harbour seal, also known as the common seal, is one of two seal species prevalent in British waters – the other being the grey, or horsehead, seal. Identifying a harbour seal is simple due to its distinctive appearance: grey or brown fur covered with a fine, spotted pattern.

Harbour seals are often 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, preferring the safety of sheltered shores and estuaries where they haul 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, while adult harbour seals have been known to weigh up to 150kg – equivalent to two adult humans. Fully-grown adults usually measure between 1.2-1.6m in length and have an average lifespan of 20-30 years.



Oystercatcher

Scientific Name: *Haematopus ostralegus*

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

Unsurprisingly, given their name, oystercatchers specialise in eating the abundant shellfish available on Britain's coastline, such as oysters, cockles and mussels, which they prise open using their strong, flattened bills. Originally a coastal species, 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, boasting 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 and can be found resident around all of the British Isles. Preferring to reside around rocky and mixed seabeds, the common hermit crab is often spotted by avid nature fans having fun in a rock pool.

Fascinatingly, 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, although brown and even purple hermit crabs have been observed. When threatened, the common hermit crab can completely retreat into its newly-acquired shell, blocking the entrance with its claws.

The common hermit crab becomes an adult at just one year of age and tends to live a maximum of 10 years. The overall size of the common hermit crab is dependent upon the shell it inhabits but they boast an average body length of a mere 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. **...is one of two seal species prevalent in British waters...**

Which of these words is closest in meaning to prevalent? Tick one.

- common
 mundane
 unnecessary
 obscured

2. Join the boxes to match each creature to its scientific name.

Oystercatcher

Harbour Seal

Common Hermit Crab

Pagurus bernhardus

Haematopus ostralegus

Phoca vitulina

3. Find and copy three adjectives from the text used to describe an oystercatcher's bill.

- _____
- _____
- _____

4. Fill in the missing words.

_____ a harbour seal is _____ due to its _____ appearance.

5. **...the common hermit crab can completely retreat into its shell...**

Rewrite this sentence in your own words.

6. Fully explain how the common hermit crab's body has evolved to increase its chance of survival.

7. Explain why the name of the oystercatcher is unsurprising.

8. Give two ways in which the instructions for rock pooling in this text emphasise the importance of safety.

9. Summarise the information in the first paragraph of the text in 20 words or less.

10. Explain why harbour seals may prefer sheltered shores and estuaries over beaches and sea lochs.

Answers

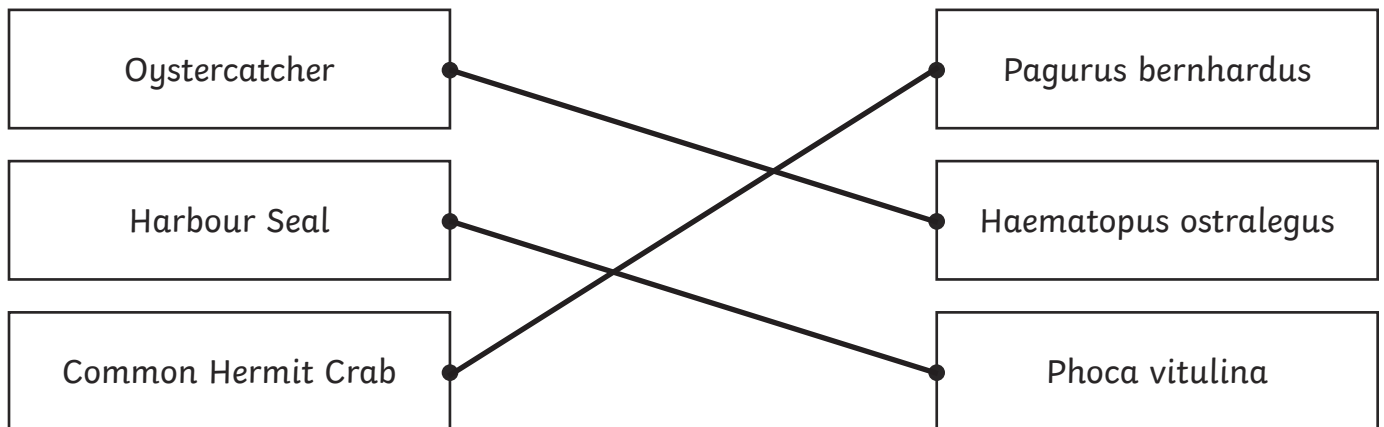
1. ...is one of two seal species prevalent in British waters...

Which of these words is closest in meaning to prevalent? Tick one.

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2. Join the boxes to match each creature to its scientific name.



3. Find and copy three adjectives from the text used to describe an oystercatcher's bill.

Accept any three of the following: long; powerful; orange-red; strong; flattened.

4. Fill in the missing words.

Identifying a harbour seal is **simple** due to its **distinctive** appearance.

5. ...the common hermit crab can completely retreat into its shell...

Rewrite this sentence in your own words.

Pupils' own responses, such as: The common hermit crab can go completely into its shell.

6. Fully explain how the common hermit crab's body has evolved to increase its chance of survival.

Pupils' own responses, such as: The common hermit crab's body has evolved to be soft and twisted, allowing it to fit into any available shell. This gives the common hermit crab the maximum possible chance of finding a shell to protect itself from predators and helps them to survive longer.

7. Explain why the name of the oystercatcher is unsurprising.
Pupils' own responses, such as: The name of the oystercatcher is unsurprising because it enjoys catching oysters, as its name suggests.
8. Give two ways in which the instructions for rock pooling in this text emphasise the importance of safety.
Pupils' own responses, such as: The instructions in the text emphasise the importance of being supervised by an adult in lots of different places. The instructions use adverbs such as carefully and gently to tell readers to be careful. They also give clear instructions about the safest way to do things, such as using shoes with good grip.
9. Summarise the information in the first paragraph of the text in 20 words or less.
Pupils' own responses, such as: Despite its harsh conditions, lots of different creatures live along Britain's ever-changing coastlines. This text tells you more about them.
10. Explain why harbour seals may prefer sheltered shores and estuaries over beaches and sea lochs.
Pupils' own responses, such as: Harbour seals may prefer the sheltered shores because they are more protected from predators than they are at the beach and in lochs. They may also find it easier to hunt for their food and raise their young safely.