

Habitat Fact File



Saltmarsh

You can find saltmarsh habitats across the UK coastline in sheltered areas. Saltmarshes can be divided into zones:

- The area at the top of the shore only gets flooded by the sea during storms
- The middle zone is flooded by the sea on high tide but has no water on low tide
- The area at the bottom is always covered by the sea

Many plants live in saltmarshes. Grass-like plants grown in the areas covered by the tide. Higher up the shore are larger flowering plants, and finally shrubs in the top zone.

Saltmarshes are muddy environments, making them a great habitat for worms and burrowing shells. This also means saltmarshes are great places for birds to feed.



Sandy seafloor

Underwater sandy habitats are the most common marine habitat.

They might look boring, but there's plenty of diversity!

Because there aren't many plants or boulders to use to hide from predators, animals living in the sand have to adapt. Some animals are camouflaged and some animals burrow in the sand to hide.

Many fish use sandy habitats to hide their eggs in burrows in the seafloor.

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Open ocean

Our area of the ocean is the North East Atlantic. This can be split into smaller coastal seas:

- To the south of the UK is the English Channel
- On the east is the North Sea
- Between Great Britain and Ireland is the Irish Sea

There's a huge variety of animals that live in the ocean, from tiny microscopic plankton to huge whales.

Some animals spend their whole life in the open ocean waters, like mackerel. Others, like basking sharks, spend their time in shallow coastal waters. And some animals, like seals, live on beaches and use the open ocean to feed on fish.



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Seagrass beds

Seagrass is the only flowering plant in the ocean. It's found in calm, shallow, sunlit coastal waters around the world.

When seagrass grows in large areas, the habitat it creates is described as a 'seagrass meadow' or 'seagrass bed'.

Globally, seagrass beds are known for their value as fish nurseries for many important species, including flatfish and cuttlefish. They're also home to many bivalves, worms and starfish.

In the UK, two rare and wonderful creatures live solely in seagrass beds: the spiny seahorse and stalked jellyfish.

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Rockpools

Rockpools are found across the UK on rocky shores. The whole habitat is inundated with water during high tide, but only the pools store water at low tide.

Rockpools are challenging places to live due to:

- Changing tides
- Strong wave action
- Sunlight heating the water in the pools, causing evaporation and increased salinity
- Rainwater decreasing salinity
- People walking along the coast, possibly disturbing or standing on creatures
- Competition for space with many creatures (predators and prey) forced into small rockpools during tide.

The animals that live in rockpools have to be well adapted to learn to cope with this harsh, ever-changing environment.

Rockpools provide animals many places to find shelter: in cracks in boulders, under rocks, and under seaweed.

Useful definitions:

Species

A group of living organisms consisting of similar individuals that share common characteristics and are capable of interbreeding.

Adaptation

A change in body shape and behaviour to enable a creature to live in a particular area or in particular conditions.

Habitat

The natural home or environment in which an animal, plant or organism lives. A habitat contains all an organism needs to survive such as food and shelter.

Microhabitat

A microhabitat is a small area within a larger habitat, which is home to a creature.

Answers for habitat matching game:

Saltmarsh – lugworm, curlew, mud shrimp, oyster catcher, tellin

Rockpool – Limpet, anemone, shore crab, periwinkle, blenny

Sandy Seafloor – Flat fish, cockle, weaver fish, burrowing urchin, sand eels

Open Ocean – Harbour porpoise, mackerel, jellyfish, seal, john dory

Seagrass bed – Seahorse, cuttlefish, stalked jellyfish, corkwing wrasse, tube anemone