

Ocean habitats Fact File



UK ocean habitats and wildlife

Saltmarshes

Saltmarshes are tidal habitats found along sheltered coastlines. Saltmarshes are very muddy, making them a great home for worms, and a great place for birds to feed.

Saltmarsh species include:



© Dronegraphica



Lugworms live underground in a U-shaped burrow. They make their burrow by eating sand and mud and pooing it out. They're a favourite food for many birds.



Curlews are famous for their long, curved beak. They are named after the 'cur-lee' sound they make. The number of curlews has reduced and they are at risk of extinction.



Mud shrimp live underground in a U-shaped burrow. They use their large antennae to dig, and they shed their skin like a snake when they grow.



The **oystercatcher** has a loud high-pitched bird song, which sounds like 'kleep kleep'. Their beaks can be flat like a hammer to smash open shells to eat, or they can have a sharp beak to slice shells in two.

Key terms

A **habitat** is the natural home or environment in which an animal, plant or organism lives. A habitat contains all an organism needs to survive, like food and shelter.

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

A **species** is a group of living organisms of similar individuals that share common characteristics and are capable of interbreeding.

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Rockpools

Rockpools are tidal habitats found all over the UK on rocky shores. Rockpools are hard places to live with changing tides, sometimes strong waves and competition for space.

Rockpool species include:



© Michael Austin



Limpets have a tongue covered with tiny teeth which they use to scrape algae off rocks to eat. Their teeth are made from the strongest material in the animal kingdom – it's even stronger than most man-made materials.



Beadlet anemones have a jelly-like body. They stick themselves to rocks and use their tentacles to sting and catch prey. They can also curl up into a ball when they need to.



Shore crabs have a hard exoskeleton, which they shed when they grow (like a snake). They use their claws when feeding or fighting.



Common periwinkles are a type of sea snail. They use their foot to glue onto the rock and to scrape algae off the rock to eat.

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Sandy seafloor

Sandy seafloor is the most common marine habitat. There aren't many plants or boulders to hide from predators, so animals living in the sand have to adapt. Some burrow into the sand to hide and some are camouflaged.

Sandy seafloor species include:



© PublicDomainPictures



Plaice are a type of flatfish and are camouflaged in their habitat. They start life looking like normal fish, but slowly begin to swim horizontally and live on the seafloor. As they go through this change their eyes move around so that both eyes are on top of their head!



Cockles are a type of bivalve, meaning they have two shells. They bury themselves in the sand hiding from predators like flatfish. Their shells have horizontal growth lines which can be used to age them, just like a tree.



Weever fish hide in the sand and have a sharp black dorsal fin which contains poison and is used to scare off predators. These stings can also be very painful to humans when accidentally stepped on.



Sand eels aren't eels, but eel shaped. They are an important food source for seals and seabirds like puffins. To avoid being eaten they swim in shoals.



Burrowing urchins are also called sea potatoes and heart urchins. They use their soft spines to burrow into sediment, and under their spines is a heart-shaped shell.

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Open ocean

Our part of the open ocean is called the North East Atlantic Ocean. This can be split into smaller coastal seas. There's a huge variety of animals that live in the ocean from tiny microscopic plankton to huge whales.

Open ocean species include:



© Cristian Palmer



Bottlenose dolphins are very clever animals and enjoy being sociable and hanging out in groups. They eat fish and squid and will swallow their food whole.



Bluefin tuna can grow up to 300cm long and can live for around 40 years. They travel all across the world, covering huge distances. They are very fast swimmers and amazing predators.



Basking sharks are 8-10 metres long, making them the second-largest fish in the world. They are filter feeders, feeding on tiny plankton species.



Although **By-the-wind sailors** look like jellyfish, this jelly-like creature is actually made of lots of tiny animals called hydroids. Their sail-like structure helps them to catch the wind and sail across the ocean.

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Seagrass beds

Seagrass beds are found in calm, shallow, sunlit, coastal waters around the world. Seagrass is the only flowering plant in the ocean. Across the world seagrass beds are important as fish nurseries, as young fish can hide between the plants.



© divedog

Seagrass beds are home to species like:



Spiny seahorses are a type of fish. They can change colour to match their environment. The male seahorse looks after the eggs in a pouch (a bit like a kangaroo pouch).



To hide from predators, **cuttlefish** can change colour to camouflage and they can spray black ink at their predators. They lay their black grape-like eggs on plants to stop them floating away.



Stalked jellyfish – Unlike other jellyfish this creature does not swim around, but spends its life attached to a plant. They have 8 arms, and each arm has about 45 tentacles!



Corkwing wrasse females and baby fish are brown/green in colour. Males are very brightly coloured, but can change colour at night when sleeping to become camouflaged.