

# Little Tern

The little tern is a small seabird that makes a long journey every year – all the way to Africa and back! It comes to the North Wales coast to raise its young then departs at the end of the summer for the warmer climate of West Africa.



**Description:** The little tern is a small seabird, about the same size as a blackbird. They have narrow pointed wings and a forked tail. Their feathers are white and grey, and their head is black. They have a yellow bill with a black tip and orange legs and feet.

**Where they live:** Little terns spend their summers in Europe and their winters in West Africa. The long flight between the two is called a migration. In the summer little terns lay their eggs and raise chicks at only a few sites in Britain, including just one site in Wales – on the Denbighshire coast. They prefer sandy and pebbly beaches which help to camouflage their eggs and chicks. Can you spot the chick in the photo?

**Food:** The main food of little terns in North Wales is a small silvery fish called the sand eel. Little terns hunt for their prey in the shallow water just off the beach. They hover over the water then dive down to catch the fish in their bill.

**Behaviour:** Little terns live in noisy colonies. Males and females form pairs and look after eggs and chicks. Before the chicks can fly, their parents bring food to them in the nest. The chicks need to grow strong to be ready to fly to Africa in August.

**Conservation:** The main threat to little terns is disturbance of their nesting colonies. People and dogs using beaches can disturb the birds so much that they might abandon their nests and the chicks will die. In Denbighshire the little tern colony is fenced off from the public to help prevent the birds being disturbed.

# Common Starfish

The common starfish is an unusual creature with five arms, suckers for feet and a stomach that comes out of its mouth! Despite its name it isn't a fish at all. Starfish are invertebrates which means they have no backbone.



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**Description:** The common starfish can vary in colour from yellow to red, and sometimes violet. It has five arms which have rows of “tube feet” on the underside. These have suckers at the tips which help the starfish to hold onto surfaces and move around. The upper surface has spines which help protect it from predators.

**Where they live:** Common starfish are found in the Atlantic Ocean including the coast of Britain. They live in the shallow coastal waters and can often be seen at low tide in rock pools and on beaches.

**Food:** The common starfish is a predator. It feeds on worms, other starfish and sea shells like mussels and cockles. To get to the tasty creature inside the two halves of the shell, the starfish attaches itself firmly to the shell and pulls apart the two halves a little. The starfish's stomach then comes out of its mouth and goes inside the shell where it releases chemicals to digest the prey and the starfish sucks it all back in through its mouth. The common starfish has a good sense of smell which it uses to find its prey.

**Behaviour:** If a common starfish loses an arm, for example it is eaten by a predator, it can grow one back. Baby starfish are tiny and many will die, so females release up to 2.5 million eggs each. These eggs float around in the ocean and some will eventually grow into starfish.

**Conservation:** Common starfish are widespread and not currently threatened with extinction. But we need to look after our planet and our seas to make sure that starfish continue survive in the future.

# Bottlenose Dolphin

The bottlenose dolphin is one of the most well known animals found in Welsh seas. Just like humans, bottlenose dolphins are mammals. They are warm blooded and breathe air. Bottlenose dolphins are very sociable and live in family groups.



**Description:** Bottlenose dolphins are grey in colour and can grow to 3.8m long. Males are bigger than females. They have a dorsal fin on the back and their tail is called a fluke.

**Where they live:** In the UK bottlenose dolphins are found in many areas including the north Wales coast, but are especially common in Cardigan Bay in west Wales.

**Food:** Bottlenose dolphins are predators and mainly feed on fish, which they catch in their jaws. Sometimes a number of dolphins will work together to catch their prey. As well as looking for their prey, bottlenose dolphins use a sophisticated system called 'echolocation' to work out where their prey are by measuring the time it takes for an echo to return. By making a series of clicking sounds and listening for their echoes a dolphin can home in on a fish and catch it. This is very helpful in murky water where dolphins can't see well.

**Behaviour:** Just like humans, bottlenose dolphins are mammals. Female dolphins give birth to a single calf in the summer, which is fed on milk for around 18 months and stays with its mother until the age of four or five. Dolphins are highly intelligent and have even been known to play games. They are often very energetic, even jumping clear out of the water, called 'breaching'.

**Conservation:** Bottlenose dolphins are threatened in some areas by human activities such as fishing and hunting. In the UK they are protected by law, meaning it is illegal to kill, injure or disturb bottlenose dolphins.

# Basking Shark

The basking shark is the biggest fish found in British waters and the second biggest in the world (after the whale shark). Despite their huge size basking sharks pose no threat to humans. Like all sharks, their “bones” aren’t bone at all – instead their skeletons are made from cartilage like our nose and ears.



**Description:** Basking sharks can grow up to 10m long and their fins can be up to 2m. They weigh around 7 tonnes which is about the same as two elephants! They have a huge gaping mouth and pointy snout. Their bodies are covered with a layer of mucus which protects the skin.

**Where they live:** These sharks are found in both the northern and southern hemispheres, mainly in cooler, like those around Britain. They come to Welsh waters in summer, following their food, where they can be seen at the surface of the ocean. In winter basking sharks move to deeper waters or the open ocean.

**Food:** Despite their large size, basking sharks eat very tiny prey called plankton (the miniature animals and plants that float around the ocean). To feed, basking sharks swim along slowly (at about walking pace) with their huge mouths wide open. They filter plankton out of the water that passes over their gills. Basking sharks eat millions of plankton every hour! This process is known as filter feeding.

**Behaviour:** Basking sharks spend most of their lives alone. They breed slowly, with females having young every two to four years. Baby basking sharks are about the same size as an adult human!

**Conservation:** Human activities such as hunting threaten basking sharks. Sadly in some parts of the world sharks are killed for shark fin soup. They are also accidentally caught in fishing nets. Basking sharks are protected by law in the UK but globally they are threatened with extinction.

# Reading Comprehension Questions

Read the information sheets about little tern, common starfish, bottlenose dolphin and basking shark, then answer the following questions.

## Little tern

1. Where do little terns spend the winter?

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2. Why do little terns lay their eggs on sandy and pebbly beaches?

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3. When do the little tern chicks need to be ready for their migration?

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## Common starfish

4. How many arms does a common starfish have?

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5. What do starfish have to protect them from predators?

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6. Which sense does a starfish use to find its prey?

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## Bottlenose dolphin

7. What is a dolphin's tail called?

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8. What do young dolphins feed on?

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9. What is it called when dolphins jump clear out of the water?

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## Basking shark

10. What is the largest fish in the world?

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11. What are sharks' skeletons made from?

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12. What do basking sharks eat?

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## General questions

13. Which of the animals is an invertebrate?

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14. Which of the animals uses echoes to find its prey in murky water?

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15. Which species is a mammal?

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