**2.1 Sea Life**

**Page Title:** Sea Life

**Breadcrumb:** Dive in > Sea Life

**Heading:** Look into Sea Life of the Emerald Isle ...A guide to the creatures off the coast of Ireland.

**Body Copy:**

**Sub heading 1:** Irish Sea Creatures

**Sub heading 2:** Sharks

**Sub copy 2:**

<img>A Basking Shark off the coast of Ireland</img>

Some people would be surprised or maybe nervous to hear we have sharks in Irish waters. In fact there are 10 species of sharks that use Irish waters. Certain species are migratory and come to Ireland to feed in our rich waters. These include the Basking shark, Blue shark, Short-finned Mako, Six Gilled Shark and the Porbeagle shark. Our resident sharks are the Spur Dogfish, Greater Spotted Dogfish, Lesser Spotted Dogfish, Siki Dogfish and Smooth Hound.

The rays are a relative of the shark family. There are many rays in Irish waters, including the Thornback Ray, Blonde Ray, Sting Ray, Cuckoo Ray, Undulate Ray, Homelyn Ray, Painted Ray, Electric Ray, Common Skate and White Skate.

The basking sharks are the second biggest sharks in the world and are found throughout Irish seas during the summer months. They can measure up to 11m in length. They are usually seen alone cruising slowly at the surface, with dorsal fin above the water and their mouth opened as it filters the coastal waters for food.

Blue Shark measure around 2-3m. They are blue with a white under belly, called counter shading which helps to camouflage themselves from their prey. They have long pectoral fins that allow them to glide along ocean currents. Blue Shark never stop swimming; if they did they would sink. They are top predators feeding on squid, mackerel and herring.

The dogfish is our most common shark. They are found in coastal areas, and are often seen resting on the seabed in the day. They hunt at night, feeding mainly on crustaceans (crabs and shrimps), molluscs (especially whelks), and small fish. Dogfish use their sense of smell to catch prey and can also detect faint electrical fields produced by the muscles of hidden prey.

**Sub heading 3:** Seals

**Sub copy 3:**

<img>A Seal off the coast of Ireland</img>

There are two native species of true seals in Irish waters, the grey seal and the common (harbour) seal.

The grey seal is more abundant than common seal, and is found throughout the Irish coastline. They breed and haul out mainly in isolated areas.

The Common (Harbour) seals are found in more sheltered areas Carnsore Point (Co. Wexford), Clew Bay (Co. Mayo) and Tralee Bay (Co. Kerry) and use sand and mud banks to breed and haul out. Common seals can usually be seen individually or in groups when hauled out.

Seals are believed to have evolved from river bears 30 million years ago. Increased competition on land drove them back towards sea hunting. Seals are warm-blooded mammals, and have a thick layer of blubber (fat) that helps maintain their body temperature. On land seals look clumsy and awkward but in the water they are agile and capable of moving very fast.

They are a top predator feeding on mackerel, pollock and shellfish, etc. They dive to hunt, normally for 5 -15 minutes at depths of 30 - 70 metres but can dive up to 45 minutes. Seals exhale on diving and keep their nostrils closed during the dive.

On deeper dives they have many ways to help them stay down for longer. They can reserve their blood supply allowing oxygenated blood only to their heart, brain and lungs. They can also reduce their heart rate from 120 beats a minute to only 5 beats a minute. Seals have a relatively large blood volume (up to twice that of terrestrial mammals).

**Sub heading 4:** Turtles

**Sub copy 4:**

<img>A Leatherback Turtle off the coast of Ireland</img>

There are seven species of sea turtle in the world. They live mainly in warmer tropical seas. However, five kinds of sea turtle have been recorded around the coasts of Ireland. These are migratory species that breed in tropical waters and they turn up here mainly because they have lost their way. However, one species of turtle belongs in Irish waters, the Leatherback turtle.

The Leatherback Turtle is the largest and most wide-ranging of all sea turtles. The biggest leatherback turtle ever recorded weighed 916 kg (approx. 1 ton) found off the coast of Wales. The leatherback is appropriately named as it has a soft leather shell unlike the other sea turtles whose shell is hard and plate-like. The leatherbacks are different to other living reptiles because they are warm-blooded like birds and mammals. This enables them to feed in colder waters like Ireland and Britain and also to dive deep to depths of 1200m. Leatherback turtles come to Ireland during the summer and autumn months to feed on the abundant jellyfish.

Leatherbacks, like all sea turtles, are endangered. Firstly, in the tropics they are threatened at their nesting sites. Locals eat their eggs or kill the mother turtles for meat and coastal development interferes with the young hatchlings. Grown turtles are frequently caught in fishing nets or on long line hooks, boats hit others and some may choke from mistaking plastic bags for jellyfish.

**Sub heading 5:** Dolphins

**Sub copy 5:**

<img>A Dolphin off the coast of Ireland</img>

Dolphins are found throughout the Irish coast. The most familiar species of dolphin is the bottlenose dolphin. Shannon estuary has the largest resident (present all year round) Bottlenose population in Ireland.

There are over 115 Bottlenose dolphins using the Shannon estuary at different times of the year. Other species of dolphin that are found in Ireland are the Common dolphin, Striped dolphin, Risso dolphin, Atlantic White-sided dolphin and White-beaked dolphin. Dolphins feed mainly on fish (herring, pollock and mackerel) and squid.

**Sub heading 6:** Whales

**Sub copy 6:**

<img>A Fin Whale off the coast of Ireland</img>

Ireland is one of the best countries in Europe to whale watch. Some of the largest whales come to Ireland to feed.

Large whales such as the Fin Whale measuring up to 26m in length can be spotted off the coast of Cork (Galley Head), Kerry (Slea Head) and Wexford (Hook Head). Blue, Fin, Humpback, Sei, Minke are all baleen whales. Baleen whales don’t have teeth instead have baleen plates (comb like structure). They use these plates to sieve water for food.

These huge mammals feed on small animal plankton (krill) and small fish (herring). Sperm whale, Pygmy Sperm whale, Killer whale, False Killer whale, Sowerby’s beaked whale, Northern bottlenose whale and Long-finned Pilot whale are all toothed whales. Dolphins can also be known as toothed whales. They both have a strong set of teeth to hunt their prey.

Toothed whales form groups (pods). Unlike the baleen whales, which are usually found alone or in small groups.

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