

Wester Ross spring spawning herring: life-cycle & ecology

9. Tiny drifting animals (zooplankton) including crustaceans (e.g. shrimp) are the main food for herring of all sizes.

7. Larval herring are attracted to light and swim up near the surface to feed.

6. Herring eggs hatch after about two weeks according to the sea temperature.

5. Big storms may kill many eggs especially where maerl has been damaged and there is much sand.

4. Haddock, other fish and other animals may eat much spawn.

3. The sticky eggs are translucent and about 2mm in diameter. The egg layer may be up to 8 eggs thick, forming a cohesive carpet over the seabed.

2. Spawning takes place over several days in March in water 15m to 25m deep.

1. Maerl, a coral-like red seaweed, forms a knobby gravel which is a favoured habitat over which herring spawn.

10. Shoals move to surface waters at night to feed. During the day shoals stay in deep water.

12. Adult herring migrate from feeding areas towards the coast during autumn and winter.

13. Shoals gather in late winter close to spawning grounds. Look for gannets diving in!

11. Herring are also important as food for whales, dolphins, porpoises, seals, seabirds, other fishes and squid.

