



Wester Ross Marine Wildlife



This poster aims to encourage more people to take an active interest in looking after our wonderful coastal seas. Wildlife habitats range from sheltered sea lochs to rocky headlands exposed to arctic storms. Many of the North Atlantic's most remarkable animals can be seen here, sometimes close to land.

Come and explore: bring a drysuit or warm wetsuit and snorkel, a sea kayak; or book a boat trip. Take care: the seas can be dangerous. Paddle lightly; enjoy!

Common Dolphin (May to October)
Pods of 10s to 100s, usually offshore, sometimes in sea lochs chasing shoals of mackerel. Spectacular, frequently leaping clear of the water.

Gannet (March to November).
Watch where gannets are diving in for mackerel or herring and you may also see cetaceans. St Kilda is the nearest breeding colony.

Feeding frenzy (May-October).
Excited seagulls gather where cetaceans have herded smaller fish towards the surface; and around sea lochs where shoals of whitebait (sprats) are chased into the shallows by mackerel.

Bird Islands. Nesting sites for Gulls, Terns, Great Skua, Greylag Geese, Shag, Cormorant, Fulmar, Black Guillemot; and Storm Petrel on Priest Island. White-Tailed Eagle hunting grounds. Vivid green vegetation grows where bird droppings have enriched soils.

Harbour Seal (all year). Dog-like face. Often inquisitive and entertaining. Pups are born in summer on haul-outs in sheltered bays and islands. The larger Grey Seal can be seen in the harbours at Gairloch and Ullapool.

Minke Whale (May to October) Seen from headlands to within 200m of the shore. When it surfaces to breathe, the dark back and dorsal fin appear for about 3 seconds. Feeds on small fishes.

Plankton bloom. Tiny planktonic algae multiply rapidly in the fertile Hebridean waters during the long days of spring and early summer; and are eaten by zooplankton which sustains many fishes and other marine animals.

Basking Shark (May to October). Grows to over 10m long. Filters zooplankton concentrated where surface currents converge. Look for a shiny dorsal fin in the mixing line, sometimes less than 400m from the shore.

Otter (all year). Almost anywhere around coast; sometimes seen during the daytime in areas away from disturbance. Small fishes and crabs are taken; and frogs, trout and eels from freshwater habitats.

Mackerel (April-October). Filter-feeding shoals spray the surface of the water where currents converge. From mid-summer, larger mackerel hunt smaller fish close inshore. Anglers: please take only those that you can eat.

Blue Skate. Skate of >2m are found in local waters where they may still breed. In other parts of the NE Atlantic, over-fishing has almost eradicated stocks; now listed as 'Critically Endangered' by IUNC.

Porpoise (all year) Groups of ~20 can be seen in sea lochs in summer and autumn, in pursuit of small fish and mackerel. Surfaces for air quietly; unlike dolphins, rarely jumps clear of the water.

Moon Jellyfish (April-August). Blooms of jellyfish sometimes form slicks which are washed up on beaches. Stinging Lion's Mane Jellyfish feed on Moon Jellyfish from mid-summer.

Kelp forest. Several kinds of kelp grow around the shore providing habitat for other seaweeds and food and hiding places for many animals. Look for colourful wrasse, crabs, starfish and sea urchins.

Corkwing Wrasse. One of several colourful wrasse species found mainly in rocky areas. Feeds on worms and crustaceans. Territorial males make mound-like nests of algae in summer and entice females in to lay eggs.

Herring (all year). Vast shoals formerly supported important local fisheries in sea lochs and in the Minch. Maerl beds to the west of Melvaig and Greenstone Point were important spawning grounds.

Norway Lobster (*Nephrops*). Live in burrows in muddy sea beds, usually in deeper water, and scavenge anything they can find. 'Prawns' sustain important local fisheries.

Sandeels (May-October). Hide in sandy sea beds, feed on zooplankton and fish fry; are eaten by larger fishes, seabirds and cetaceans. Sea Trout grow fat in years when sandeels are plentiful.

Pollack (all year). Pollack of >60cm long can sometimes be caught from rocky headlands as they swim among kelp. Feeds on other fish and crustaceans; spawns in April.

Sea Urchins. Powerful omnivorous grazers, scraping barnacles as well as seaweeds from rock surfaces, kelp stems or piers.

Hermit Crab. Snorkellers can find them year-round on both rocky and sandy seabeds; the largest ones live in whelk shells. Versatile, feeding on other animals or bottom deposits.

Maerl. Formed by a free-living red sea weed, unattached calcified nodules grow slowly to create coral-like maerl beds which shelter many animals including juvenile fish and shellfish. Easily damaged by dredgers and siltation.

Purple Sunstar. Up to 40cm across, sunstars feed on other starfish, sea cucumbers and other slow moving animals.

Flame shell (*Limaria hians*). Using its fringe of orange tentacles and by snapping shells, this delicate bivalve is able to swim. Nests may be built on top of each other to form flame shell reefs providing habitat for other animals.

Plaice. Plaice are most active at night. Rod-caught record plaice were caught in local waters in the 1970s. Juvenile plaice can be seen in shallow water on sandy beaches.

Ocean Quahog (*Arctica islandica*). Hard-shelled clam with thick black outer skin. Lives buried in muddy sand. The world's longest-lived animal, to >400 years old.

Seagrass beds. *Zostera marina* is our only truly marine flowering plant. Seagrass meadows are home to many animals including some fishes which use them as nursery areas. Seagrass beds are recovering from damage and disease in the Sound of Longa and other areas with help from local people.

Lobster. Lives for up to 50 years, sometimes reaching a body length >60cm. Usually emerges from lair to feed at night. One claw is used for crushing, the other for cutting. Important local fishery.

Please support efforts to protect and restore important habitats, marine wildlife and the prolific fisheries upon which Ullapool and other local villages were founded.

For more information, please contact local tourist information centres or visit the Wester Ross Environment Network website www.wr-en.co.uk.

DRAFT 13 Jun 2013. Also illustrated: Breadcrumb Sponge, Dahlia Anemone, Dead men's Fingers, Phosphorescent Sea Pen, Lion's mane Jellyfish, Paddleworm, Velvet Swimming Crab, Edible Crab, Long-legged Spider Crab, Brown Shrimp, Painted Topshell, Large Necklace Shell, Sea Hare, Sea Lemon, Fan Mussel, Horse Mussel, Great Scallop, Razor Shell, Striped Venus, Banded Wedge Shell, Banded Venus, Pullet Carpet Shell, Common Otter Shell, Lesser Octopus, Common Starfish, Red Cushion Star, Black Brittle Star, Common Heart Urchin (Sea Potato), Cotton Spinner, Brown Trout (sea trout), Small-headed Clingfish, Snake Pipefish, Long-snouted Seahorse, Lump sucker, Rock Cook, Butterfish (Gunnel), Two-spot Goby, Dragonet, Shag, Herring Gull, Great Skua, Black Guillemot, Black-throated Diver, Common Tern, White-tailed Eagle, Oystercatcher.

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