

# School Talk

Sherkin Island Marine Station  
 Sherkin Island  
 Skibbereen  
 Co Cork  
 Ireland

Hi everyone,

This is the page where we would like you to have your say. Tell us about environmental work you carry out in your school or what you would like to hear about in the next issue of Nature's Web. Send us your letters, emails or stories and if we can we will print them in our next issue. Tell us about an issue in your environment that bothers you, one that you would like others to hear! Here are some letters I received from Union Hall N.S in Co. Cork asking questions about nature. I'd love to hear from more of you so write to me at the above address or email me at [editor@naturesweb.ie](mailto:editor@naturesweb.ie) and I'll do my best to answer some of your questions!

Best Wishes

Audrey. The Editor.

Dear Editor, Please can you tell me how long tortoises live?

*From Sarah, age 9*

Large tortoises have been known to live over 300 years but usually live anything from 50-100 years. Generally water turtles live for about 30-40 years.



Dear Editor, How long is the longest shark?

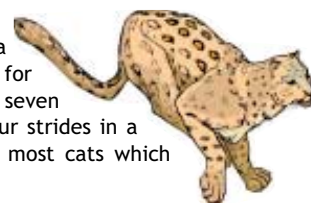
*From Aidan, age 8*

Whale sharks are fish and are the largest sharks in the world, reaching maximum lengths of 12 to 20 metres. Don't worry though, these 'gentle giants' don't eat people or even fish, they eat plankton that they sieve out of the water!

Dear Editor, How fast are cheetahs?

*From Paudie, age 9.*

The cheetah is the fastest terrestrial mammal with a speed of up to 71 mph, which it can only keep up for roughly 275 metres. The cheetah moves forward roughly seven to eight metres in a single stride and can complete four strides in a second. Their paws are less rounded and harder than most cats which helps the cheetah make quick turns.



Dear Editor, Please can you tell me how many horses there are in the wild. Thank you.

*From Kate, age 9*

There are two types of horse that live in the wild. 'Wild' and 'feral' horses. Wild horses are really and truly wild, their ancestors were never domestic (used by humans) where as feral horses were once domestic animals but then ended up in the wild. There are many feral horses to be found in the U.S.A. and Canada (Mustangs), Australia (Brumbies) and New Zealand (Kaimanawa horses). The only truly wild horse left today is Przewalski's Horse which can be found in Mongolia in Asia. Hope that helps!



Dear Editor,

Please can you tell me how long giraffes necks are. *From Katie, age 9*

An adult giraffes neck is about six feet or 1.8 metres long. It is very muscular and is used to reach high into trees to eat the leaves.

There are special valves in the blood vessels that help the blood get all the way up to the head! Long necks are also useful as they help the giraffe see long distances so it can see predators coming!



Dear Editor, Please can you tell me how many fish are in the ocean?

*From Ellen, age 9.*

There are more than 20,000 identified species of fish, but how many fish there are altogether is anyone's guess!

Dear Editor, Can you tell me, how high trees can grow?

*From Michael, age 9*

It is believed the tallest tree ever measured was an Australian *Eucalyptus regnans* in, Victoria, Australia, reported in 1872 by forester William Ferguson. It was 132.6 m (435 ft) tall and almost certainly measured over 150 m (500 ft) originally. In 1991, a coast redwood called The Dyerville Giant was thought to be 1,600 years old when it fell. It was 113.4 m (372 ft) high, not counting the 1.5 m (5 ft) of buried base. It grew in California, USA and was the tallest tree of modern times.

Dear Editor, How do birds get across the ocean?

*From Csaba, age 9.*

Birds' bodies are especially light (they have hollow bones) so they add on extra fat stores to give them energy for the long flight during migration. During the trip some feed during the day and fly all night. Some appear to have a little sleep while they fly (only for a minute or so) while others can send one half of their brain to sleep as the other half stays awake! It is thought that birds use the position of the sun and the stars as a compass to find their way but unfortunately strong winds over the sea during migration sometimes push birds off course causing them to get lost. Hope that answers your question. For more information on migration have a look at the "Bird Page" in the Trial Issue of Nature's Web.

Dear Editor, Can you tell me how many teeth a Sperm whale has?

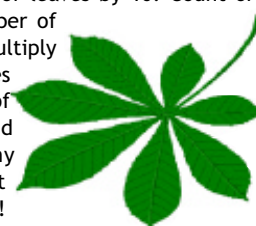
*From Joshua, age 9.*

There are 18-28 functional teeth (teeth that it uses) on each side of the lower jaws, but the upper teeth are few, weak and are not used by the whale. The lower teeth fit into sockets in the upper jaw. The gullet of the Sperm whale is the largest among cetaceans and is the only gullet large enough to swallow a human!

Dear Editor, How many leaves are on a horse chestnut tree? *From Cathy, age 9*

There is no specific number of leaves on a tree. It can depend on species, location, and many other factors.

To work out roughly how many leaves on a tree first count the leaves on say...10 branches. Then work out the average number of leaves per branch by dividing the number of leaves by 10. Count or estimate the total number of branches on the tree. Multiply the number of branches by the average number of leaves per branch to find out roughly how many leaves on the tree. Let me know how you get on! Best of luck!



Dear Editor, How many spikes has a hedgehog? *Conor, age 9*

Hedgehogs are covered on the back and sides with up to 500 smooth spines. The face, legs, tail and belly are covered with fur.

