



Sketch: © Audrey Murphy

DO OYSTERCATCHERS CATCH OYSTERS?

With such a name, you would think that oystercatchers are eating oysters all day, everyday. But that is not so. Oysters do not normally form a large part of their diet as the oyster's shell is extremely difficult to prise open.



Oystercatchers

Latin: *Haematopus ostralegus*

Irish: Roilleach

The oystercatcher is a wading bird that usually gathers in large, often noisy flocks on rocky and sandy shores and on mudflats. Resident in Ireland all year round, it is also a winter visitor from Iceland

and the Faeroes. Its black and white plumage, orange beak and reddish-pink legs make it very easy to identify. The strong bill digs deep for worms and it is able to open shells, either by hammering them or prising them open.

To build a nest the female oystercatcher lines a scrape in the

sand, gravel or grass with shells and pebbles. If danger approaches the nest and young, the oystercatcher flies around drawing attention to its self by calling loudly to distract the predator away.

Fact File

Colour: Black and white plumage, pink legs, long orange bill, red eyes with an orange ring around them.

Length: 39-44 cm

Diet: Worms and shellfish such as mussels.

Habitat: Flat beaches, estuaries, coastal farms and fields.

No. of eggs: 2-3



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Large numbers of oystercatchers can be seen in Ireland from September to March, on all coastal habitats.