

# Nature's Web

Issue No.2

Summer 2006

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Seafood Recipe

Study of Birds

Seals

Otters

Marram Grass

Life as a Lifeboat  
Coxswain

School Talk

Experiments

Learn More

The World  
Around Us

Up Close -  
Wracks

Fun Page

Water  
Conservation

Beach Safety

Nature's  
Noticeboard

With warmer weather and longer days, the summer gives us the chance to experience and observe nature and the sea up close.

Whether you are a keen naturalist interested in the seals and otters that play about in the tide or an avid conservationist that collects rubbish from the beach or maybe more interested in getting into the water yourself, then this is the season for you.

Early in the morning and just before dusk is a good time to go out wandering near the shore. Many creatures, such as otters and birds, take advantage of the dull light. It gives them some protection from predators and allows them to move about freely. With a huge growth of vegetation at this time of the year birds have a great supply of food and so can always be seen out foraging in the garden, along the roads and near the shore. Young birds will also be venturing out learning to fly so keep an eye out for them.

The sea is generally a few degrees warmer so now is the time to take the plunge! Borrow a pair of fins, a pair of goggles and a snorkel and spend some time searching in shallow waters for life. This is one of the best ways to observe marine life and you may see many different types of fish, crabs, seaweeds, sea urchins and starfish. Be careful though, the sea can be dangerous so only swim on safe beaches with someone looking after you. Check out page 15 in this issue on how to be safe on the beach and in the water and go out and enjoy yourself!



Photo courtesy PDPphoto.org

## SURF'S UP!

Photo: Robbie Murphy

## Summer Sunsets



Summer is the season with the longest days, the warmest weather, the clearest skies and the most sun. We experience summer in Ireland when the Earth is on that part of its orbit where Ireland is facing more toward the sun. When this occurs the sun rises higher in the sky, stays in the sky longer, and the sun's rays hit the ground more directly. Likewise, in winter Ireland is oriented away from the sun so therefore the sun stays low in the sky, is up in the sky for a shorter period, and its rays strike the ground less directly.

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# Editor's Page

## Support Your Lifeboat!

I recently joined the Baltimore Lifeboat Fund Raising Committee to help raise money for our local lifeboat. Every time we venture out in boats we can be safe in the knowledge that the lifeboat is nearby if we should get into difficulty. Regardless of the weather, the crew of the lifeboat battle the elements day or night to rescue people and boats in trouble. Whether it is someone sick on a nearby island or a boat with a broken down engine, the crew are on hand. Unfortunately it costs a lot of money to look after the lifeboat, so whenever you see someone fundraising help out in what ever way you can. They need your support...and it's a good cause!

Photos: Audrey Murphy



On a visit to a boatshow earlier this year my friend Tom and I took the Crew Training Challenge to see who could get into the lifeboat gear the quickest...I won!!! Hard luck



The summer is a great time of the year for beach combing. Have a look for crab claws, shells and sea urchins (above). Remember though that if it smells, don't take it home. It's not a smell you or your family would like to have around your house!



Young starlings are a noisy bunch in the summer. They are sociable birds and often gather together in large groups for a good natter! Roof tops, gardens and telephone wires will be full of these chatty birds over the next while. You can't miss them!

## SEAFOOD RECIPE

### Seafood Kebabs



Photo: BIM

#### What you need:

- Prawns
- Red Onion
- Lemon Wedges
- Bay Leaf
- Strips of Rasher
- Oysters
- Cherry Tomatoes
- Mushrooms
- Salmon cubes

#### What to do:

Thread prawn tails and salmon onto skewers, adding red onion segments, bayleaves and lemon wedges. Brush with marinade before placing on barbecue. Wrap oysters in strips of rasher. Thread on to skewers adding cherry tomatoes, mushrooms, bayleaves and lemon wedges. Brush with marinade before placing on barbecue. Cooks in 8 minutes!

Brought to you by BIM. [www.bim.ie](http://www.bim.ie).

## Welcome to the Summer Edition of Nature's Web!

Dear Reader,



Welcome everyone to the summer issue of Nature's Web. There are lots of great articles for you to read and some great experiments to try. This summer I spoke with Kieran Cotter from Baltimore Lifeboat for 'All in a Day's Work'. He describes what it is like to head out in bad weather and saving lives at sea. Check out the nature news from around the world on page 11 and jokes on page 13.

We would love to hear your views and comments and suggestions for future articles. Have a good read!

Signed: Audrey Murphy

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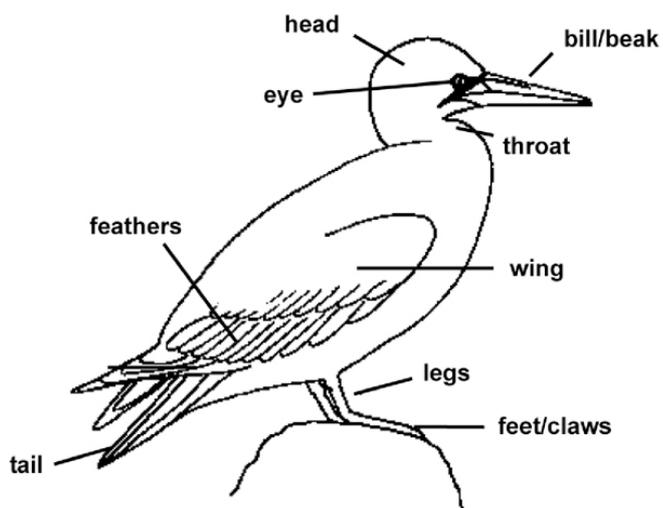
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# Bird Life

## Study of Birds

The study of birds is called **Ornithology**. To be able to identify a bird there are a few things to note; its size, colour, shape of bill, length of legs, its call or song, the shape of its wings, the shape of its tail and how it flies.



### Bills

The shape of a bird's bill usually depends on the type of food the bird eats. For example: the heron has a long bill (to spear fish), and curlews have long curved bills (to find worms and molluscs).

### Claws and Legs

Some birds have long legs which help them walk through deep water. Other birds have short legs which allow them hang upside down to get at food. Their feet are also very important. Most

have four toes - three that point forwards and one that points backwards. They come in different shapes and sizes and can be used for various activities i.e. walking, running, hopping, perching, climbing, clinging, hunting, wading, swimming and fishing. The type of feet a bird has depends on where the bird lives and what the bird eats.

### Singing and Calling

Every bird has different calls and songs. Each noise will have its own meaning. Songs may be used for pleasure and to show how happy a bird is. Calls can be used to pass on news about food and nesting sites, to warn off predators and to attract a mate.

### Sight and Sound

Birds spend their day searching for food, preening, courting, and defending their territory.

For all these activities they will need good eyesight and hearing. Birds have very large eyes and the bigger they are the better the bird will be able to see. Birds can even see colour like we do. Hearing is also very sharp in birds but they have no visible external ears; the 'ears' on some owls are not really ears at all but tufts of head feathers.

### Feather care

There are many ways in which a bird can look after its plumage (feathers). Preening, which involves taking oil from the preen gland above its tail and covering each feather to protect them; bathing, which cleans the feathers and also spreads the oil over the body; scratching, which removes parasites; sunning, which involves spreading its wings so as to cool the body, and dusting, which involves lying in dry earth or sand to help get rid of parasites.

## Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus* Meantán gorm

Both the male and female blue tit collect moss, grass, wool and hair and make a nest in the holes of trees, walls and nest boxes. Blue tits are very clever when it comes to getting food. They peel bark off trees to get at insects underneath. During courtship the males fluff up their wings and crown feathers to attract a female.

**Colour:** Blue tail, wings and top of the head. Green back, yellow belly, white cheeks and black stripe across eyes.

**Length:** 10½-12 cm

**Diet:** Insects, berries, seeds, caterpillars, spiders, nuts and seeds on bird tables.

**Habitat:** Woodlands, gardens and hedges.

**No. of eggs:** 8-15



Sketches: Audrey Murphy

From February onwards each year you can help birds build their nests by leaving different things out for them. Hair collected in your hair brush, odd bits of wool and fluff from your carpet can all be used by birds to make a soft nest for their eggs. Never touch a bird's nest as birds will smell you have been near it and may never return! If eggs are inside it they will be left to die.



Nesting Birds!

# Aquatic Life

## Seals

Seals, sea lions, fur seals and walrus are marine mammals and belong to a group known as PINNIPEDIA (meaning wing-footed) and are referred to as PINNIPEDS. They differ from most other marine mammals in that they live both on land and in the sea. Of this group only seals are commonly found around the Irish coast.

In water, pinnipeds swim and dive for food. Between dives they can often be seen resting on the surface. Their bodies can behave like a cork and rest in a vertical position with their heads out of the water. This gives them time to breathe and allows them to keep an eye on their surroundings.

On land they can be seen, often in large groups, laying around in the sun with their hindflippers stretched out, fanning themselves, keeping cool. They can also be seen sleeping on the shore, although they can also fall asleep in the sea in a resting position!!

### Basic facts about Seals

They are not fish

Adult males are called BULLS

Adult females are called COWS

Their young are called PUPS

They are adapted for life both on land and in the water.

They often gather on land in large groups called PODS

They breathe air

They have streamlined, torpedo shaped bodies

They are carnivores

They usually consume their prey whole on in large chunks.

They have large eyes which help them see clearly both in the water where there is little

light, and on land

Their eyes remain open when diving

They close their ears and nostrils when diving

They have a layer of fat under their skin called BLUBBER

They all have a fur coat that differs in colour and pattern between species.

They have a coat of oily fur which also helps them to keep relatively warm and dry.

Most species of seal pups are born with a white 'woolly' coat called LANUGO

Most pinnipeds come to the shore to mate, give birth and to moult.

The amount of time spent on land differs between the species.

Their main enemies are killer whale, shark and Man.

### Grey or Atlantic Seal

#### *Halichoerus grypus*

This seal has a long donkey-like muzzle and an arched nose. Its nostrils are widely separated and from the front look like they are shaped more like a W than a V. The position of the nostrils can be used to identify this seal from the Harbour seal. In most adults the coat, as the name suggests, is grey with many random spots. However, this can vary and be creamy white in some females to almost black in some males! Their pups shed their lanugo coat after about 2-3 weeks and grow a coat similar to that of the adults. These seals are often very noisy and have loud wailing and grunting sounds.



Photo: Robbie Murphy

### Common or Harbour Seal

#### *Phoca vitulina*

This seal has short flippers and is relatively small in size. Its cat-like head is large and rounded, with a short muzzle. Its nostrils are closely set together and form a V-shape. The adult Harbour Seals' fur coat ranges from yellow-grey to dark brown with coloured spots, while its pups are born with a spotted silver coat. The adults are known to be quite silent but may give a clear short bark, while the pups have a high pitched wail. They may be seen on land in groups as big as a thousand but are usually solitary when in the water.



Photo: Andreas Trepte, Marburg.

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### FACT FILE:

**Body:** Long & slender  
**Colour:** Brown fur on back, paler underside  
**Length:** Head to body: 10-120cm  
Tail - 40-45cm  
**Weight:** Male - 10.1kg  
Female 7kg  
**Food:** Butterfish, rockling, eels, coarse fish, sea urchins.  
**Additional features:**  
Small ears  
Long thick tail  
Webbed feet

# Otter

## *Lutra lutra*

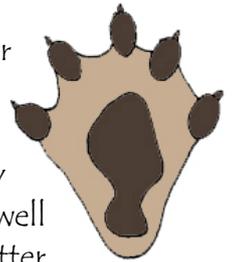
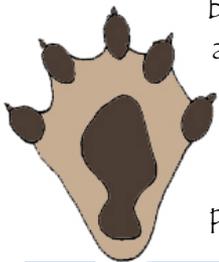
The river otter (*Lutra lutra*) is the only otter to be found in Ireland. Its name in Irish "maḍra uisce" translates as "water dog". It can be found in streams, rivers, lakes, estuaries and along the coast. It is quite shy and often the only clue of an otter's existence is the presence of otter tracks and spraints (droppings). Spraint heaps can be found on grassy mounds along the water's edge, usually along well worn tracks where streams enter

the sea or where otters cross waterways. The spraints are usually black and full of fish bones, beetle wings and feathers. Otters are usually nocturnal (come out at night), but are sometimes seen during the day. They need a good supply of clean, fresh water nearby so that they can clean their fur regularly, as well as a good supply of food. They can live for around 10 years and have a litter of two or three cubs. They live in areas of good vegetation away from humans, which provide a safe place to live and hide.

Photo: Sarefo



The Otter - *Lutra lutra*



# Giant Otter

The largest otter in the world (not found in Ireland) is the Giant Otter *Pteronura brasiliensis*. It is a native of South America. It is an endangered species and is very rare. This otter can reach up to 6 ft (1.8m) in length and weigh 34 kg. In the wild it has a lifespan of about 12 years and upto 21 years in captivity. Its fur is chocolate brown in colour with a white patch on its neck. It is well suited to life underwater as its fur is waterproof, its feet are large and webbed and it can close its ears while it dives. The otter's eye are large, which help it to find food underwater. It feeds on crabs, snakes and catfish. Each year the female Giant Otter gives birth to 1-5 young otters in an underground den. They cannot swim when they are born but are taught by their mother after about two months.



Photo: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Marshall Jones

# Marram Grass



Marram Grass has tiny pores on the underside of its leaves to allow carbon dioxide to enter the plant.



Sand dunes are important as they provide a habitat for wildlife and also a defence against the sea.

They are a very unstable habitat as the sand constantly shifts in the wind. The wind also dries the sand, which causes the water to evaporate, leaving a lot of salt behind. Unlike sandy shores, which are covered by water at high tide, sand dunes are not regularly covered by water.

For plants to survive in sand dunes they must adapt to these conditions. They must avoid drying out by taking in as much water as possible and reducing the amount of water lost. Plants must also be able to reproduce in this environment in order to survive.

Marram grass is the main plant that stabilises the sand so that other plants will be able to grow. It has a strong underground root system that creeps through the sand, forming a strong attachment. When it dies it also provides nutrients that enable other plants to grow. In order to survive in this environment, Marram grass has thick waxy leaves that curl to prevent water loss. Sea Holly and Sea Rocket are some of the other plants that can be seen growing in sand dunes.



Photos: Robbie Murphy

Marram grass stabilises the sand so that other plants can grow.

## FACT FILE

### Marram Grass

*Ammophila arenaria* – Muiríneach

**Characteristic:** strong creeping roots.

**Flower colour:** Greyish-green.

**Height:** 60-120 cm.

**Leaves:** Grey-green and curled. Long, slender, flexible and waxy.

**Flowering season:** June to August.

**Habitat:** Sand dunes.

# All in a Day's Work

## Kieran Cotter – Lifeboat Coxswain

### PROFILE

Kieran Cotter lives in Baltimore, Co. Cork and for the last 31 years has been heavily involved with the Baltimore Lifeboat. Over the years he has taken part in many sea rescues in all kinds of weather. Here he tells us what it is like to be a lifeboat



Photo: Audrey Murphy

### A Day in the Life of Kieran Cotter

#### Are you a full time coxswain on the lifeboat?

No, I'm a volunteer coxswain not a full time one, so I only get called out when I am needed. I'm a shopkeeper the rest of the time! At our Station in Baltimore we have only one full time crew member and that is the mechanic who looks after the boat.

#### How long have you been a lifeboat crew member?

I first became a crew member on the lifeboat in January 1975, became a 2nd coxswain in 1982 and coxswain in 1989.

#### What does volunteering on the lifeboat involve?

In a regular month we would have an average of about two emergencies where we help people and boats in trouble. We also have about two exercises, each one lasts about three hours; one out at sea and the other in the boathouse. Each year I must also do a week long training course.

#### Do you work alone or as part of a team?

I work as a team. There are 25 active crew members in the Baltimore area, 6-7 go out on the boat and some others work on the shore to launch the boat.

#### What happens if there is an emergency?

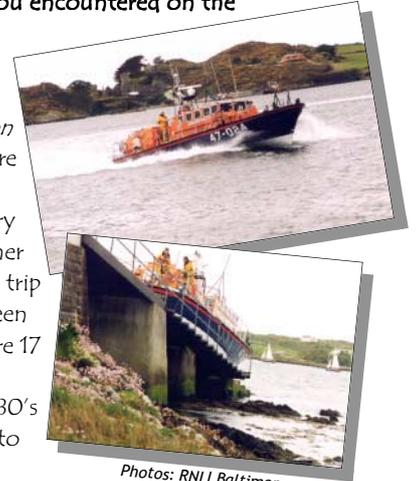
Once my beeper goes off it takes four to six minutes to get to the lifeboat station. I get into my wet weather gear and lifejacket and then get onto the boat. Our lifeboat is on a slip in a boathouse and all crew must be on the boat with their lifejackets on before we move. The mechanic starts the boat while the shore crew open the doors and prepare to launch the boat. Once we are outside the door the mast, aerials and radar scanner are put up and the navigation and radio equipment are turned on. Then we head off.

#### What safety issues must you consider when working?

All crew members must wear a lifejacket at all times and safety harnesses in bad weather that attach us to the boat. There are always risks going out in the boat in bad weather and accidents do happen but these days crews are very well trained and boats are very well equipped so the number of accidents have been reduced. 100 years ago lifeboats went out and never came back but nowadays thankfully everything has improved.

#### What is the worst weather you encountered on the lifeboat?

We were out in some severe weather in the 1990's, like when the tanker *The Kowloon Bridge* hit rocks near Baltimore and another time when we tried to tow a boat into Bantry Bay but we failed as the weather was so bad. The most famous trip in bad weather would have been the Fastnet Race in 1979 where 17 people died. We went out in some severe gales in the late 80's and 90's but it doesn't seem to get as bad now.



Photos: RNLI Baltimore  
[www.baltimorelifeboat.ie](http://www.baltimorelifeboat.ie)

#### What made you decide you wanted to be a lifeboat crew member?

It was what people did around here when I was young and also my father was 2nd coxswain at the time so I followed in his footsteps.

#### What is your favourite memory as a lifeboat member?

When we got our new boat *The Hilda Jarrett* back in 1988. She was a big improvement. She went twice as fast and was much more comfortable. Overall she was a much better boat. But she is now 18 years old so we are due to get a new boat in 3-4 years time, which will be a huge improvement again.

#### What's the best part about your job?

A lot of the enjoyment comes from just being involved.

#### What experience do you need to be a lifeboat crew member?

You don't need any. The RNLI has a one year training programme for crew members. These probation crew members don't go out on emergency calls but do go out on training exercises. There is also a week long training course in Poole in Dorset and then many other courses you can do if you want to get to a higher level. To become a crew member you must be fit, have good eyesight and not be colourblind.

#### What do you least like about your job?

Long call outs in bad weather. We have been out as long as 24 hours in bad weather. The lack of sleep is tough and you are not inclined to eat either!

#### What advice would you give to anyone wanting to be a lifeboat member?

If you live near a lifeboat Station go visit it and speak to one of the crew members who will be happy to talk to you. If you are not yet old enough to be on the crew you can always help fundraise as money is always needed to look after the boat and all the equipment.

# School Talk

Sherkin Island Marine Station  
Sherkin Island  
Skibbereen  
Co Cork  
Ireland

Hi everyone,  
Here are some emails I received recently asking questions about sea creatures from around the world. I love reading facts about different creatures in the environment and hope you do too!

Keep those emails coming in!

Best Wishes  
Audrey, The Editor.

editor@naturesweb.ie

Dear Editor,  
Can you please tell me which fish is the most poisonous?  
Thanks, **Mary Age 9**

Hi Mary, the most poisonous fish is the stonefish. It's poison is powerful enough to kill a human. Although it is not a real fish, the Box jellyfish is the most poisonous jellyfish. It's poison is so deadly it shocks the human heart so much it causes a heart attack! Luckily these are found around Australia and not around Ireland.



Dear Editor,  
I have a turtle that moves really slowly but would like to know if there is a fish in the sea that moves even slower. Thank you,  
**Charlie, age 10.**

Hi Charlie,  
The slowest fish is the seahorse which travels at the really slow speed of 0.01 mph!!! That's pretty slow isn't it! And did you know the male seahorse carries the eggs in his pouch until they hatch?!



Dear Editor,  
Can you please tell me which is the smallest fish in the sea and which is the largest?  
**Robbie, Age 10**

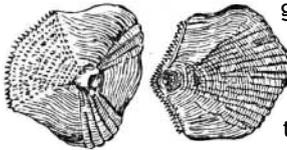


Hi Robbie, the smallest fish is the goby. An adult goby is about half an inch, which is about the size of your thumb nail! The largest fish is the whale shark, which grows to more than 50 feet in length, that's about the length of five cars!



Dear Editor,  
I have a goldfish which is six years old and I know that because I bought it when it was a baby but how can you tell how old other fish are?  
**Jack, Age 12**

Hi Jack, you can tell how old a fish is by counting the growth rings on its scales just like you count the rings on a tree. You need a microscope to see the rings but it's a fun thing to do. A



good magnifying glass may work so have fun trying!

Dear Editor,  
I love hearing the names of groups of creatures, some of them sound funny like a gaggle of geese, do you know any others?  
**Sarah, age 11**



Hi Sarah, I like hearing them too, some of my favourites are a siege of herrings, a smack of jellyfish, a business of ferrets, a charm of finches, a kindle of kittens, a leap of leopards, a tiding of magpies, a parliament of rooks but the best one has to be a blush of boys!

Dear Editor,  
I saw clams on a beach on holidays recently but they were small, what size can they grow to?  
**Niall, Age 11**

Hi Niall, I once went diving at the Great Barrier reef in Australia and I saw a clam that was over two feet long! But I was told that was a small one as the largest one ever seen was four and a half feet long! Guess what it is called....the giant clam! It weighed as much as four grown men!



Dear Editor,  
While I was on my holidays a trawler brought in a turtle that got caught in the nets. I think they called it a leatherback turtle, can you tell me a little bit about it.  
**Megan, Age 12**



Hi Megan, unfortunately many turtles get trapped in fishing nets and drown because they cannot get out. The leatherback turtle gets its name as it has a tough leathery back instead of a hard shell. It is the largest of all turtles (growing up to 8ft long) and can occasionally be found around Ireland and in many areas around the world. They love to eat jellyfish and often dive down very deep looking for food. But remember, be careful with your plastic bags as turtles often mistake them for jellyfish and choke on them if they eat them.

# Experiment With Nature

## Is the Glass Really Full?

### What you need:

- 1 clear glass
- water
- 10 to 20 pennies



### What to do:

1. Fill a glass to the very top with water, until it will hold no more.
2. Hold the coins on the edge of the glass and carefully start slipping them into the water.
3. Keep adding coins until the water overflows.



### What happens and why?

Water molecules have a strong attraction for one another. Inside the glass, the molecules that are surrounded by other molecules are attracted in all directions. But the molecules at the surface have no water above them, so they are strongly attracted downwards by the molecules below them. These attractive forces are strong enough to keep the water from spilling over the top of the glass, even when the level rises quite a bit above the rim of the glass. Eventually the volume of water above the rim of the glass becomes too great for the surface tension to hold, and the water will spill.

Here are some activities you can try at home or at school. Please ask for permission from a grown-up before you begin.

## Mixing soap, water & pepper

### What you need:

- Toothpick
- Bowl
- Liquid dishwashing soap
- Pepper
- Water



### What to do:

1. Fill the bowl with water
2. Sprinkle about a teaspoon of pepper above the water
3. Dip the tip of the toothpick in the liquid soap
4. Place the tip of the toothpick with the soap side into the water.
5. Watch as the pepper *dramatically* backs away from the toothpick.



### What happens and why?

The actual science happens because the soap breaks the surface tension of the water, like popping a balloon. It is the water that moves, not the pepper that is floating on it.

## Does Water Expand When Frozen?

### What you need:

- Ice Cubes
- Clear Plastic Glass
- Small glass bottle with a large mouth
- Plastic wrap and a rubber band



### What to do:

1. Fill the glass with water until it over flows.
2. Add one ice cube to the glass.
3. Carefully clean up the spilled water and leave the glass undisturbed until the ice melts.
4. Fill the glass bottle with water and cover it with

the plastic wrap and rubber band.

5. Put the bottle in the freezer and leave it until the water is frozen solid.



### What happens and why?

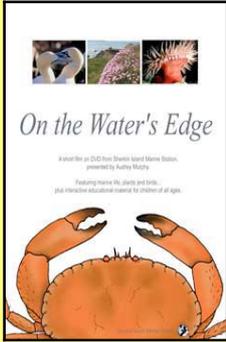
There will be less water in the glass after the ice melts. This is because the ice will have taken up more room in its frozen form and less room having melted. The frozen water in the bottle will have a peak in the middle showing that it has expanded.

# Learn More

## NEW DVD!!

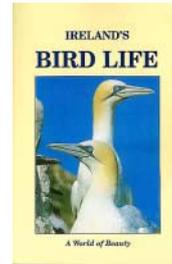
### "On the Water's Edge"

Sherkin Island Marine Station has launched a new dvd called 'On the Water's Edge'. It is made up of a short film on life beside the sea and is presented by Audrey Murphy. It includes interactive material for children of all ages. Available from: Sherkin Island Marine Station, Sherkin Island, Co. Cork. €16.95 post free.



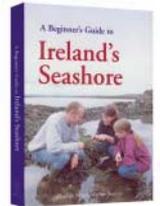
A collection of photographs of Ireland's bird life, featuring over 200 colour photographs taken by one of Europe's finest wildlife photographers, Richard Mills. 160pp

€16.00 including postage



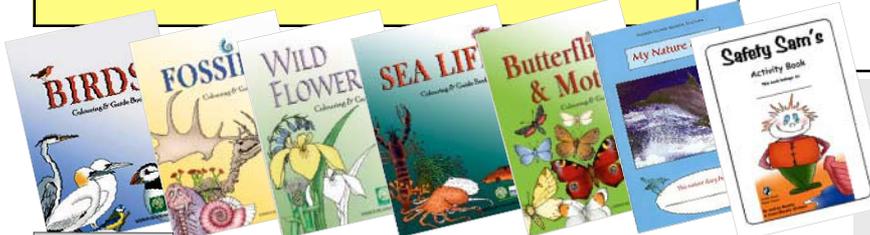
**A Beginner's Guide to Ireland's Seashore** is a pocket-sized guide, suitable for beginners of all ages. This book will help you to explore the wonders of marine life found on the shores around Ireland. 206pp

Only €6.97 including postage



To order books, send your name and address along with a cheque or postal order made payable to Sherkin Island Marine Station to:

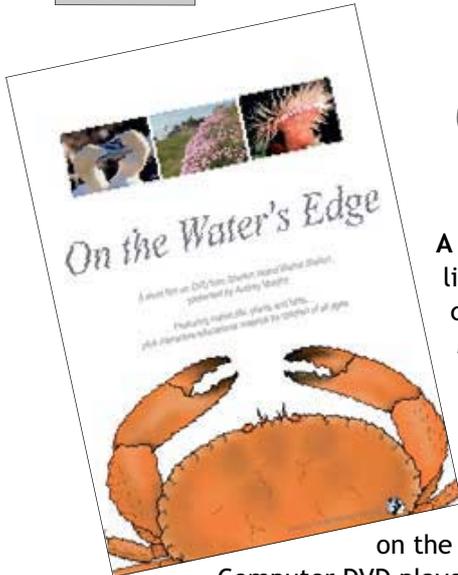
Matt Murphy,  
Sherkin Island Marine Station,  
Sherkin Island,  
Skibbereen, Co.Cork. Ireland.



Only €1.75 each including postage or €8.50 for all seven! 32pp each

Sherkin Island Marine Station has published a range of colouring books, guides and activity books for children. Each thirty two page **Colouring & Guide Book** gives you the chance to colour, identify and learn about the wildlife around Ireland. **My Nature Diary** and **Safety Sam** activity book will keep you busy for hours.

# On the Water's Edge



A short film on DVD featuring marine life, plants and birds found along our coastline. Presented by Audrey Murphy and produced by Sherkin Island Marine Station, it aims to provide a small insight into life on the water's edge.

Interactive educational material for children of all ages is available

on the DVD and can be viewed on a

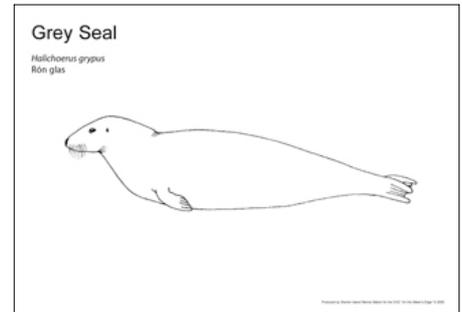
Computer DVD player. The information will

- help children understand more about life by the sea
- increase their knowledge of sea life, birds and plants
- help them learn more about adaptations by plants and animals
- help them learn more about nature in a fun way.

The interactive material includes:

- easy to use interactive material
- printable colouring sheets of animals and plants
- a slideshow of over 40 animals and plants and
- nature's quizzes to make learning fun
- and much more!

Price: €16.95 (Available directly from Sherkin Island Marine Station - post free)



Print drawings to colour, slideshows, quizzes and much more.



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# The World Around Us



"Foreign Correspondent"  
Michael Ludwig reports on the some strange goings on in the natural world.

## FOXES IN LONDON!

Can you believe there are over 10,000 foxes roaming around London! Unlike country foxes that are shy and keep out of sight, the London foxes can be seen, regularly walking along local footpaths near humans and they often make their dens in peoples gardens. Instead of chasing rabbits and chickens they live on a diet of take away dinners from rubbish bins! A fox was even found asleep in a filing cabinet in the Houses of Parliament, and another in the grounds of Buckingham Palace, reportedly killing some of the Queen's pink flamingos. Some people think foxes are pests as they dig up lawns and frighten pets but there are many who love to have the foxes around and even feed them to encourage them to stay!



## 400 Dolphins Stranded

Over 400 dead bottlenosed dolphins recently washed ashore on a beach on the East African island of Zanzibar. Scientists are unsure as to why the dolphins were stranded as it is very unusual for so many animals to be stranded and die at any one time. It is thought that low tide along with heavy rains and high winds might have disoriented the dolphins. Some scientists believe the dolphins may have surfaced too quickly after something frightened them and suffered from the bends or decompression sickness (similar to what divers suffer from).

## Honey I'm Home...!

A four year old panda that has spent his entire life in captivity has been released into the wild in China. Xiang Xiang, whose name means lucky, is the first panda that was born in captivity to be released and is now one of about 1,600 giant pandas in the wild. On the day he was released he gave two barks and ran at the film crew who were there to watch his release. Although he is now well hidden in a forest researchers can keep track of where he is as they fitted him with a collar with a satellite tracking device. If Xiang Xiang settles into life in the wild more pandas will be released. It is hoped that eventually China's wild panda population will be doubled.



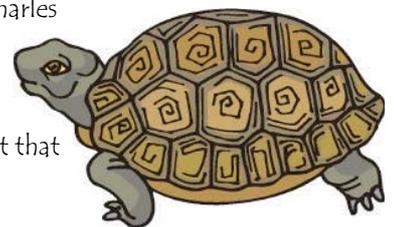
## Just Visiting!

For the first time in over 170 years a bear was seen in Germany. The brown bear, which is believed to have migrated from Slovenia, attacked sheep and chickens in farms in Bavaria. Local police wanted to track down the bear and capture it but it escaped into Austria just in time!



## Sad News...

In the spring Issue of *Nature's Web* we brought you news of Harriet the tortoise who turned 176 this year. Sadly, it was reported recently that Harriet has died after a short illness. Harriet was a Giant Galapagos Land Tortoise and it is believed that she was taken from the Galapagos islands off South America by the famous scientist Charles Darwin in 1835, transported to Britain and then sent on to Australia. She resided in the Australian Zoo where she was cared for by Steve Irwin 'The Crocodile hunter' - and his team. Harriet had made it into the Guinness Book of World Records as the world's oldest living animal. Originally it was thought that Harriet was a boy and she was named Harry but that was changed to Harriet once they discovered she was actually a girl!



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## Wracks

Everyone is familiar with the plants that grow on land, but plants also grow in the sea. These plants are called seaweeds. Seaweeds play an important role on the shore, providing food and shelter for many animals. Though there are many shapes and sizes of seaweeds, they are divided into three main groups, depending on their colour. These groups are the greens, the browns and the reds. The first seaweeds you will probably notice on the shore are the brown seaweeds, particularly the wracks. They often form large blankets of cover, protecting many of the animals and other seaweeds on the shore. They are tougher than most, as they have strong leathery leaf-like fronds and many have a powerful stipe (stem) and holdfast, which they use to attach themselves to the rocks.

### Channelled Wrack

*Pelvetia canaliculata* Caisíneach



This brown seaweed gets its name from its fronds, which are curled to form a channel on one side. This channel is used to hold water, thus preventing the seaweed from drying out. Because of this, it is able to survive without water for several days on the upper shore. Channelled Wrack is light brown in colour when wet but becomes very dark as it dries out. It has no midrib or air bladders but has tips that may swell to form reproductive bodies.

### Spiral Wrack

*Fucus spiralis* Casfheamainn



Spiral Wrack is a common brown seaweed which is well suited to living on the shore, having tough, flexible and leathery fronds that resist damage by waves and exposure to air. The frond of Spiral Wrack has a midrib and is slightly twisted; it spirals even more as it dries out. Although it can resist some drying out, Spiral Wrack is not able to survive out of water as well as Channelled Wrack, so it usually forms a belt slightly lower on the shore.

### Bladder Wrack

*Fucus vesiculosus* Feamainn bhoilgíneach



Bladder Wrack is a type of brown seaweed, but, like other wracks, it can sometimes appear olive green. It gets its name from the air bladders which are generally found in pairs along the frond. There are separate male and female plants, and at certain times of the year orange reproductive bodies grow from the ends of the fronds. Bladder Wrack can resist drying out for a short period, but needs to be covered by the tide at least once a day. Because of this, it is usually found attached to rocks and boulders on the middle shore.

### Serrated/ Toothed Wrack

*Fucus serratus* Míoránach



The saw-like or serrated edge of its frond gives this seaweed its common name. The leathery, branching frond is usually olive green in colour, though it may appear orange brown. Unable to survive out of water for long, it is found on the lower shore where its tough, flexible frond helps to reduce damage from wave action and its strong holdfast prevents it being washed away. The fronds of Serrated Wrack are often covered by the tiny white spiral tubes of the Coiled Tube Worm.

# Fun Page

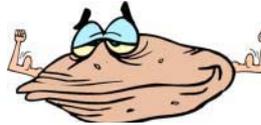
## How much did you learn?

The answers to all these questions can be found in the newsletter...see if you can remember!

1. What do Bluetits use to make nests?
2. What is the name given to the study of birds?
3. Give another name for birds feathers?
4. Are seals fish?
5. Name three enemies of the seal.
6. What is the latin name for common or river otter?
7. Do otters have webbed feet?
8. Name a habitat where you could find Marram grass?
9. Name the Baltimore Lifeboat.
10. What is the name given to a group of Jellyfish?
11. Name the slowest fish in the sea.
12. What is the smallest fish in the sea?
13. What does water turn into when frozen?
14. Name Sherkin Island Marine Station's new DVD.
15. Finish the title of this book 'A Beginner's Guide to Ireland's \_\_\_
16. Name the brown seaweed that has jagged edges like a saw.
17. To save water when washing the car should you use a hose or a bucket?
18. If you see only red flags on a beach is it safe to swim?

Answers: (1) Moss, grass, wool & hair (2) Ornithology (3) Plumage (4) No (5) Sharks, killer whales, humans (6) *Lutra lutra* (7) Yes (8) Sand dunes (9) The Hilda Jarrett (10) Smack (11) Seahorse (12) Goby (13) Ice (14) 'On the Water's Edge' (15) Seashore (16) Serrated Wrack (17) A bucket (18) No.

## Nature Jokes



Why is the sea so powerful?  
Because it has so many mussels!

What do you call a whale band?  
An orca-stra!



What bird is good at making bread?  
A dough-dough!

Why didn't the shark eat the clown fish?  
Because he tasted funny!



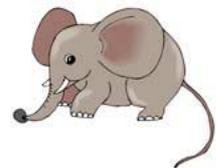
Do dolphins do things by accident?  
No, they do them on porpoise.

Why do sharks swim in salt water?  
Because pepper makes them sneeze!



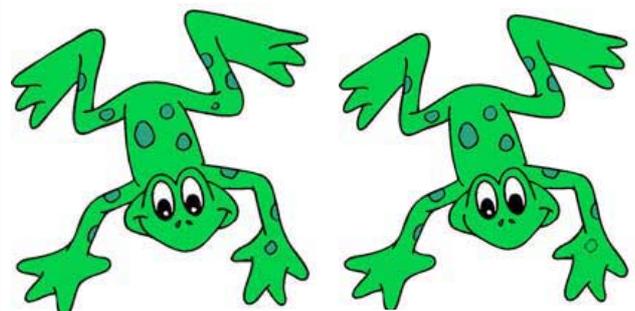
What's grey, has four legs, a tail, a trunk, but is only an inch tall?

A mouse on vacation.



## What am I saying....?

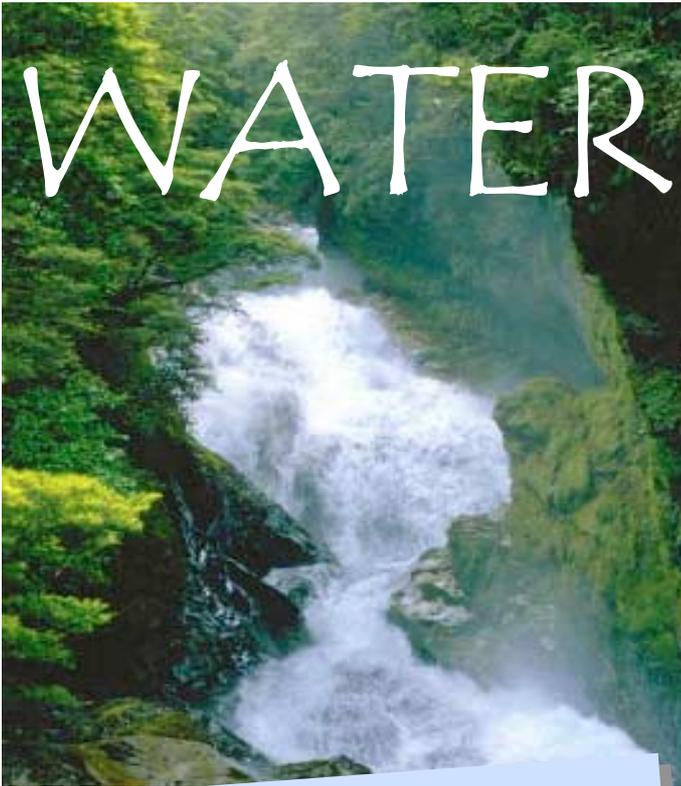
Have fun with your friends making up a title for this picture of a rhinoceros!



Spot the five differences!

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# Conservation



We often don't appreciate what is plentiful and easy to obtain. Water is a perfect example. Just turn on the tap and there it is, ready to use. But clean water is precious. It hasn't magically appeared. It has been carefully treated and piped to our home at great expense. 

Of all the water in the world, only 1% is available for human use. The rest of the world's water is either salty or locked in glaciers and ice caps. This 1% is used not only by us humans for drinking water but is also used for agriculture, manufacturing, household and sanitation needs. We drink very little of our "drinking water". Most of it waters lawns, washes our clothes and goes down our toilets and drains.

 When water is saved it also saves in other ways. By reducing your use of water over all less water needs storing, cleaning and distributing. By reducing your use of hot water you reduce the energy needed to heat the water, reducing energy bills. 

In many cases it is easy to reduce your use of water. It is mostly common sense and a matter of taking the time to think about how you use it. Get your whole family involved.

## Using Water Wisely

### WATER FACTS...

- The capacity of the average kitchen sink is 3.5 gallons (16 litres). Running your tap for two minutes can use a sinkful of water.
- Having a bath uses 30 gallons (136 litres) of water.
- A shower uses just 8 gallons (36 litres).
- The average washing machine with a full load uses 16.5 gallons (75 litres).
- The average dishwasher uses 4.5 gallons (20 litres).
- A leaking tap can waste up to 20 gallons (90 litres) of water a day.
- If you leave a tap running while washing your teeth, you waste as much as 3 gallons (14 litres).
- A running garden hose uses 4 gallons (18 litres) of water a minute.

## How Can You Help?

- Have a shower instead of a bath, they use less than half the amount of water.
- Always fill the washing machine and dishwasher before you use it to make the most of the water.
- If there is a leaking tap in your house ask an adult to fix it. If a tap is left leaking for a year it could fill a bath 52 times.
- When you brush your teeth remember to turn off the tap until you need to rinse.
- When you help to wash the car use a bucket instead of a hose. If a hose is left running for a long time it will waste a lot of water.
- Whenever you can use a watering can in the garden to water the flowers, it means water will not be wasted.
- Try and buy environmentally friendly cleaning products. remember that everything you wash down the drain goes in the rivers and sea.

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# Special Feature



## Beach Safety Messages



The RNLI is a charity providing a 24 hour lifesaving service around the UK and Republic of Ireland. Volunteers from all walks of life generously give their time, skills and commitment to save lives at sea in often difficult and dangerous conditions.

Since the RNLI was founded in 1824, its lifeboats have saved more than 137,000 lives. In 2004 RNLI lifeboats rescued 7,507 people – an average of 21 people per day. RNLI Beach Lifeguards assisted 9,041 people.

The RNLI are committed to helping young people stay safe. All our young people, whether they live inland or near the coast, need to learn how to stay safe by the sea. They may all find themselves in a difficult situation, whether they visit the beach every week or once a year. Four young people are rescued by the RNLI every day.

For further information from the RNLI visit their websites:

[www.rnli.org.uk](http://www.rnli.org.uk) [www.rnli-shorething.org.uk](http://www.rnli-shorething.org.uk)

### Here is some good advice from the RNLI....

It's very exciting going to the beach on nice days but don't be a silly bear like Paddington! On a warm day you'll want to wear your bathing suit and do be careful when playing with your inflatable toys.

Fun boats, lilos and other inflatables are best kept for the swimming pool. They can be dangerous at the seaside so make sure you have a grown up with you if you take them in the sea.

Remember – **SAFE** when visiting the beach



**Spot the dangers** means being aware of different dangers like rocks and groynes (a groyne is a breakwater which is like a fence and can be buried under the sand).

**Always go with a friend or with an adult** means being aware that it is always safer to go swimming with your friend or in a group, so that if you do get into danger there is someone there to help.

**Find and read the safety signs** means being aware of the different flags found at the beach and knowing what they mean.

- ◊ Red and yellow flags – safest place to swim.
- ◊ Black and white checked flags – surfers only, no swimming.
- ◊ Red flags – dangerous to swim.
- ◊ Orange sock – do not take inflatables into the water

**Emergency** – put your hand up and shout! This means being aware of the different ways of getting help in an emergency. If you are in danger put your hand up and shout! If you see someone with their hand up you should get help fast. Don't wander off without telling your family/friends where you are going. But, if you do get lost look for a lifeguard or another family to help you.

### Ways to get help

- ◊ Tell the lifeguard
- ◊ Tell the nearest responsible adult you see
- ◊ Dial 999 / 112 & ask for the coastguard

Other things for you and your family to remember for a safe day out:

- Remember to put on your sunscreen and a hat on warm days.
- Watch out for slippery and sharp rocks – it's a good idea to wear beach shoes to protect your feet.
- When digging in the sand – don't dig down, dig up! That means don't dig deep holes, or bury each other in the sand, which can be very dangerous – make exciting sandcastles and sand shapes instead!

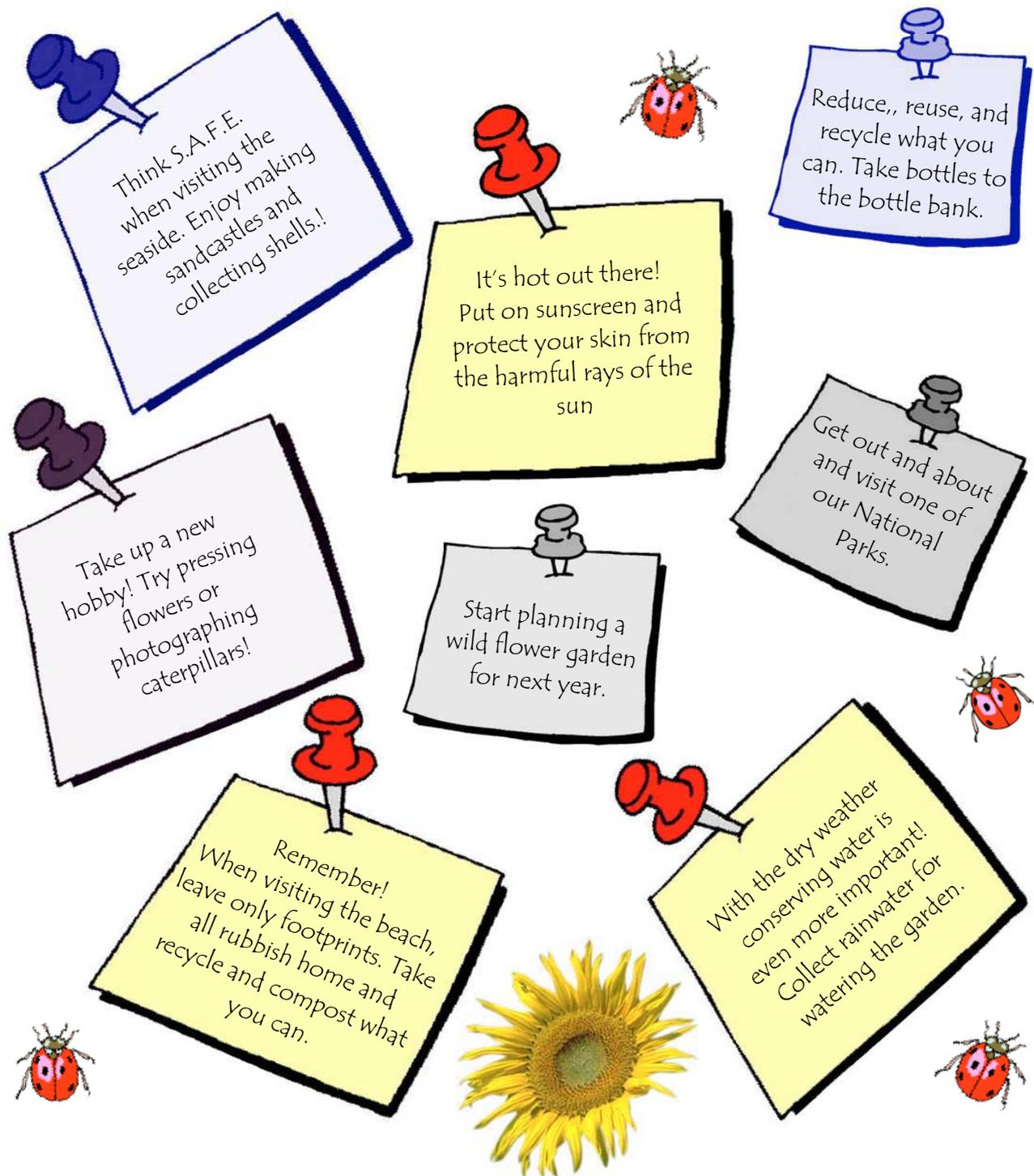
Watch out for big waves and strong currents, which can knock you over and drag you out to sea. And keep an eye on the tide. Just remember these few things and you'll be much more likely to have a great day at the beach.



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# Nature's Noticeboard!

## Summer 2006



Sherkin Island Marine Station would like to thank Pharmaceutical Ireland for their support in making this newsletter possible. We would like to thank those who have contributed to this newsletter especially Kieran Cotter, Susan Murphy Wickens, Michael Ludwig and Robbie Murphy.



Visit the Sherkin Island Marine Station website [www.sherkinmarine.ie](http://www.sherkinmarine.ie)

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