



©Scottish Shark Tagging Programme



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@Vikki Muldowney

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Flowers © Roger Wilmshurst



Berries © Derek Middleton

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(c) J Hatcher

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# Wildlife Mystery Cards

## Information Sheets

### **1 – Common Skate and shark egg case**

The largest species of skate in the world, the common skate is also one of Britain's largest fish species. They live on sandy or muddy seabeds, down to depths of 600m. Whilst mostly feeding on crustaceans with their powerful jaws, common skate have the speed and manoeuvrability to catch species such as mackerel too. The common skate lays egg cases or 'mermaids purses' that are around 25cm long, excluding the horns. After 2-5 months the juveniles will emerge already over 20cm long!

### **2 - By-the-wind-sailor or Velella**

These small organisms consist of a deep bluey purple oval disc, known as a float. Commonly found floating on the surface of the warmer waters of the world's oceans, but very little is known about their lives. They can be found washed up on the shoreline. Uses its stinging tentacles to prey on young fish and other small animals while it travels.

### **3 - Elephant Hawk Moth / and caterpillar**

It is commonly found in parks and gardens, as well as woodland edges, rough grassland and sand dunes. The caterpillars are seen from July to September and are very characteristic: greyish-green or brown, with two enormous, black eyespots towards the head. When disturbed, they swell up to show these spots and scare off predators.

### **4 – Kingfisher**

The kingfisher is a colourful bird of rivers and streams. It can be spotted sitting quietly on low-hanging branches over the water, suddenly diving in to catch a small fish. Kingfishers live in burrow-like nests near lakes and other waterways, choosing a perfect spot for fishing.

### **5 - Orange tip butterfly**

These pretty little butterflies are easy to spot as the males' wings have bright orange tips – giving them their name! They are a common sight during spring and can be found in lots of places including meadows, woodland and hedges. The adults lay their eggs on special plants to ensure that their caterpillars have the right food to eat. Orange-tip caterpillars are cannibals, eating their own eggshell when they emerge and moving on to eat other orange-tip eggs nearby.



## **6 - Badger**

Badgers are protected in the UK. It is our largest land predator feeding on small mammals, birds' eggs, worms, fruit and plants. Badgers live in large family groups in burrows under the ground called a 'sett'. There will also be a particularly smelly pit nearby that the badgers use as a toilet! They have strong front paws, which they use to dig for food. Badgers can eat several hundred earthworms a night!

## **7 - Otter**

The elusive otter is one of our top predators, feeding mainly on fish (particularly eels and salmonids), water birds, amphibians and crustaceans. Otters have their cubs in underground burrows, known as 'holts'. Excellent and lithe swimmers, the young are in the water by 10 weeks of age. Otters are well suited to a life on the water as they have webbed feet, dense fur to keep them warm, and can close their ears and nose when underwater.

## **8 - Barn owl**

The barn owl is one of our most iconic species but sadly one of our most endangered, with less than 30 to 50 breeding pairs left in Northern Ireland.

Perhaps our most familiar owl it is perfectly adapted to hunt with deadly precision in the dark of night: combined with their stealthy and silent flight, their heart-shaped faces direct high-frequency sounds, enabling them to find mice and voles in the vegetation. Throughout history, barn owls have been known by many different nicknames, such as 'ghost owl', 'church owl' and 'screech owl'. It's thought the legend of the banshee originated from barn owls.


## **9 - Swift**

Swifts spend almost all of their lives on the wing, even sleeping, drinking and mating while flying; they only land to nest. They are easy to spot as they look like an arrow whirling through the sky, and often fly in groups. Swifts spend the winter in Africa but travel to Britain every year in April and May. They feast on small flying insects by catching them in flight. Insects collect in a special pouch at the back of the swift's throat, where they are bound together by saliva until they form a kind of pellet known as a bolus, which can be regurgitated and fed to chicks. One single bolus can contain over 300 insects, with some holding over 1,000!

## **10 - Lichen**

There are approximately 20 000 different lichen species, found in almost every place on earth. Some are so hardy they have even survived in space experiments.

Lichens are made of two or more different organisms usually a fungus and an algae. They don't harm the trees they grow on and are often found growing on rocks, buildings, shells and even plastic. The type of lichen present in an area can help indicate air pollution levels.



## **11 - Shaggy Ink Cap**

The shaggy inkcap is an unmistakable fungus - its tall, white, shaggy cap providing this name and also others, such as 'lawyer's wig' and 'shaggy mane'. It is widespread and common on roadside verges, parkland, grassland and gardens, growing in small groups. It is edible when young. Similar to the shaggy inkcap, the snowy inkcap is much smaller and can be found growing in pastures on horse or cow dung.

## **12 - Hawthorn**

In May, common hawthorn erupts with masses of creamy-white blossom, colouring our hedgerows. During the autumn and winter, red fruits known as 'haws' appear. Common hawthorn is a rich habitat for all kinds of wildlife, from hawthorn shield bugs and yellowhammers that feed on the haws, to wood mice and shrews that shelter in the thorny thickets. Common hawthorn is also known as 'May thorn', 'May blossom' and 'Quick thorn' and features in many traditional May-time celebrations.

## **13 - Wasp**

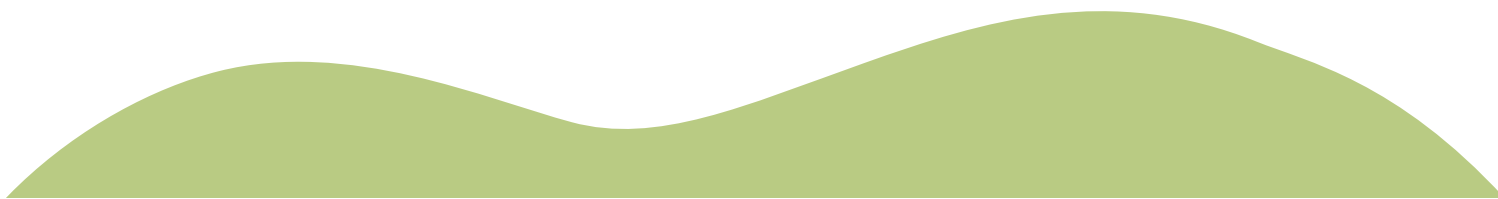
Wasps are really important insects; they can sting but this is not very common. Wasps are pollinators and apex predators killing crop pests and regulating garden insects e.g. flies, aphids, caterpillars and other invertebrates. They live in large groups in gaps in houses and roofs and live in nests built of 'paper', which is formed by the queen chewing up wood! They feed on high energy food like nectar, rotten fruit and sugary picnics, whilst their young are fed on small insects.

## **14 - Common Lizard**

This is our only native reptile. It is found across many habitats, including heathland, moorland, woodland and grassland, where it can be seen basking in sunny spots. The common lizard is unusual among reptiles as it incubates its eggs inside its body and 'gives birth' to live young rather than laying eggs. If threatened by a predator, the common lizard will shed its still-moving tail in order to distract its attacker and make a quick getaway. This leaves a scar behind, but it can regrow its tail, although it is usually shorter than the original.

## **15 - Dandelion**

Dandelions are a very important early source of nectar for insects. The seed 'clocks' of the common dandelion can carpet a grassland in fluffy, white pillows straight after the bright yellow, gaudy flowers have coloured it gold. Common dandelions grow in all kinds of grasslands from lawns to roadside verges, pastures to traditional meadows. The dandelion clock- blowing the seed heads from the flower is a favourite childhood game.





## **16 - Sphagnum Moss**

Sphagnum mosses are vitally important in the formation of peat bogs. Peat bogs are an important carbon sink useful to combat climate change. They hold water in their spongy forms long after the surrounding soil has dried out, providing essential nutrients and helping to prevent the decay of dead plant material. It is this organic matter that gets compressed over hundreds of years to form peat. Sphagnum mosses can soak up more than eight times their own weight in water.

## **17 – Red Squirrel**

The red squirrel is one of our most iconic, much-loved mammals immortalised as 'squirrel nutkin' by Beatrix Potter. Red squirrels also play a vital role in regenerating our woodlands, burying nuts and seeds which grow into future trees. Sadly, these charismatic creatures are under threat from the invasive non-native grey squirrel which was introduced from North America by the Victorians. In the last 50 years, the red squirrel has nearly completely disappeared from most of the UK and Ireland.

## **18 - Native Oysters**

The native oyster has been considered extinct in Belfast Lough since 1903. However, in the summer of 2020, live oysters were discovered for the first time in over 100 years. Common oysters, also known as Native oysters, live on the seabed in shallow coastal waters. Oysters are filter feeders, filtering plankton and detritus from the surrounding water column. Oysters start life as males, but can change sex regularly throughout their lives depending on the temperature of the water.

## **19 - Oak tree**

Oaks are fantastic for wildlife, they support many of our native species of birds, insects and mammals. Its autumnal acorns are highly prized by both people and wildlife - the former use them for fodder for pigs and the latter often store them for the long winter ahead. Its wood was traditionally used for building ships and houses, and making furniture. Oaks can grow to very old ages, living well over 500 years. One of the most famous English oaks is the Major oak in Sherwood Forest - thought to be over 800 years old,

## **20 - Round leaved sundew**

A tiny, slender plant, it stands out from the crowd because of its diet. Hair-like tendrils on each reddish leaf are tipped with glistening droplets that attract passing insects. But this 'dew' is very sticky, trapping the insect; the sundew's tendrils detect the presence of its stuck prey and curl inwards to engulf it. The 'dew' of round-leaved sundews once formed the basis of anti-ageing potions as people believed it was a source of youth and virility. Later on, the plant was also used as a love charm because of its power to lure and trap helpless insects.

