

Seals in Northern Ireland

A seal's fur is brownish-grey with small dark spots. The common seal has a body covered with a thick layer of fat called blubber. Blubber is stored under the skin and helps to keep the animal warm. A seal uses flippers for swimming. On the land, seals often like to lie in a head up, tail up position.

Common seals eat a wide variety of fish such as flounder, herring and mackerel. They may swim long distances to find food. Seals can live for up to 30 years. Females usually live longer than males.

Pups are born in June or July. They can swim and dive within a few hours of birth. The pup is fed on very rich milk and grows quickly.

Common seals can be seen all around the coast of Northern Ireland, but are mostly found on the County Down coastline. The common seal is the smaller of the two species and has a more rounded head with a short muzzle. The nostrils of the common seal meet together and form a V shape while those of the grey seal are nearly parallel and do not meet. Grey seal pups are born with white fur. Strangford Lough holds the largest population in Ireland. The best time to see seals is in July and August.

The seal population is in decline. This means that the number of seals in the natural environment is getting smaller every year. The main reasons for this are chemical and oil pollution in the sea.



Questions

1. How do seals stay warm?

2. What do seals eat?

3. What do you call a baby seal? Is there another baby animal with the same name?

4. Where can you see a seal in Northern Ireland? Can you find this place on the map of Northern Ireland?

5. What is the difference between a grey and a common seal?

6. Why is the seal population in decline?

7. Go to Exploris – the N. Ireland Aquarium website. Write how Exploris helps seals.
