



Crab

Crabs can be found all over the world, but the species most likely found on the seashore is the Common shore crab. Other species include Spider crabs, that can sometimes climb rock faces, and hermit crabs, that live in other creatures' shells to protect their soft bodies. Most crabs find it easier to move sideways on land, and some can scuttle quite fast. They can live in and out of the water.

Scientific name: *Carcinus maenas*

Description: a crustacean with eight legs and two front pincers; green-brown or reddish shell

Size: 6-8cm (2-3 inches) across

Where: native European species – but invasive and has colonised other parts of the world; middle to lower level of beach and in rock pools

When: all year round

Diet: mussels, clams, barnacles, seaweed, small crabs

Eaten by: fish, sharks, seabirds, humans



Starfish

There are many species of starfish worldwide, most with five 'arms'. If they lose an arm they are sometimes able to regrow it. The Common starfish is often found washed up on beaches and will usually survive and be carried out on the next tide.

Scientific name: *Asterias rubens*

Description: star-shaped with five arms; reddish-pink or orange above, paler below; upper surface covered with many small white spines and lower surface with tiny suckers that help it move

Size: 10-15 cm (4-6 inches) across

Where: Europe; among rocks and seaweed

When: all year round

Diet: barnacles and mussels, which it pulls open with its arms then pushes part of its own stomach into the shell and dissolves its prey with its digestive juices

Eaten by: crabs, fish, other starfish, seagulls



Razor Clam

The razor clam gets its name from an old-fashioned razor with a long blade. It burrows into the sand, squirting water to help remove grains of sand as it goes: in Scotland it is known as a 'spoot' because of the little spouts of water it sends up when burrowing at low tide. There are several species in Europe, all very similar.

Scientific name: *Ensis magnus*

Description: two long thin shells hinged together, smooth with brownish markings; inside white with purple tinge; creamy coloured body known as a 'foot'

Size: 20 cm (8 inches)

Where: on sandy beaches in Northern Europe and North America

When: all year round

Diet: mainly algae, strained from the water

Eaten by: people and used as bait to catch crabs and fish, but in Europe it is an endangered species



Thrift

This small, tough plant is sometimes called sea pink or sea clover. It is pollinated by bees and other insects.

Scientific name: *Armeria maritima*

Description: clusters of small, round pink flowers growing from springy cushions of foliage; evergreen

Size: 20 cm (8 inches)

Where: widespread in northern Europe; cliffs, shingle beaches, salt marshes, sand dunes and gardens

When: flowers April to October



Herring Gull

Watch out for Herring gulls stealing chips and even ice creams from your hand when you're at the seaside! It is a large species of gull, but the population is in decline as there are fewer nesting sites and fewer fish for them to eat. They are now often found inland, scavenging for food at landfill sites.

Scientific name: *Larus argentatus*

Description: large birds with white feathers, grey wings, black and white tail feathers, pink legs and pale eyes. They have a red spot on their yellow bills, which is where the chicks peck when they are wanting to be fed by their parents

Size: 130-150 cm (51-59 inch) wingspan

Where: Northern Europe; coast, islands, inland

Diet: predators and scavengers, they will eat fish, molluscs, worms, small birds and mammals, eggs, berries, food thrown away by humans



Sea Holly

Sea holly is endangered in most European countries, but you can find it in areas where it's not too cold in the winter.

Scientific name: *Eryngium maritimum*

Description: prickly blueish leaves and round blue flowers that look a bit like thistles or teasles; deep roots

Size: 60 cm (24 inches)

Where: Europe, North Africa, Middle East; shingle beaches and sand dunes

When: flowers July to September



Bladderwrack

This is one of the commonest types of seaweed. It has air sacks, called bladders, that help it float upright in the water so that it can absorb nutrients better. If you squeeze an air sack it will pop, so it's sometimes known as 'pop weed'.

Scientific name: *Fucus vesiculosus*

Description: yellowish-brown shiny flat strips with air sacks, growing close together

Size: 15-100 cm (6-39 inches)

Where: rocky shores, under water at high tide but exposed at low tide

Eaten by: tiny fish and molluscs, who hide amongst the branches



Cockle Shell

If you walk along the seashore collecting seashells, you will probably see plenty of cockle shells. They are bivalves: two shells joined by a muscular hinge.

Scientific name: *Cerastoderma edule*

Description: creamy-brown, dome-shaped with ridges; smooth and white inside

Size: 5 cm (2 inches)

Where: Europe, North America, West Africa; muddy and sandy shores and estuaries

Diet: filters plankton from the water
Eaten by: oyster catchers and herring gulls, crabs; harvested and also farmed as a popular seafood

Seashore