BALTIC SEA RESIDENTS: SEALS

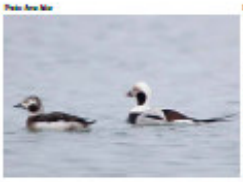
The Baltic Sea is home for 3 seal species: the grey seal, the ringed seal and the harbour seal (the latter occurring only in the southern part of the Baltic Sea).

Baltic ringed seal is the smallest seal in the world. It is an Arctic species, whose life depends on the climate - it can give birth to the calf only on ice. This once very numerous species in the Baltic Sea has become endangered by now - the current number of ringed seals in the Baltic Sea is 6500-8000.

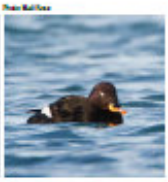
Grey seals are active travellers inhabiting the entire Baltic Sea. Their numbers that decreased significantly in 1970ies have recovered by now, being currently ca 24 000 animals.

AND BIRDS

More than 150 species of birds are related to the Baltic Sea - using it for feeding, breeding on its islands and coast, stopping during moulting or migration or wintering.



Long-tailed duck is a small diving duck that is breeding in Arctic but wintering in the Baltic Sea. Males can be recognised by their tall pointed tail. The sound of this bird is a loud "a-aHI" audible over long distances if large flocks are singing together in chorus.



Velvet scoter is one of the darkest of 18 duck species wintering in the Baltic Sea. This broad-spilled duck collects molluscs and crustaceans from the sea bottom as deep as 30 metres.

Arctic terns are attacking anyone walking into their nesting colony (left). The hatchlings of the arctic tern (right).

Gulls and terns are nesting on the islands, islets and shores of the Baltic Sea.

Common eider is a breeding, migratory and wintering bird species in the Baltic Sea, which numbers are decreasing.

On the photos (in order of decreasing size): Great black-backed gull, Herring gull, Common gull, Black-headed gull.

The poster has been prepared with the contribution of the LIFE financial instrument of the European Community in the frame of the project "Innovative approaches for marine biodiversity monitoring and assessment of conservation status of nature values in the Baltic Sea" (MARMONI, LIFE09 NAT/LV/000238). For more information visit http://marmoni.balticseaportal.net

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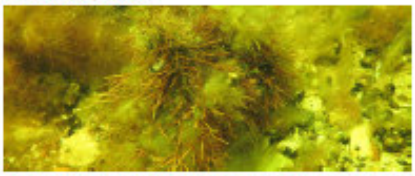
LIFE AT THE SEA BOTTOM

Blue mussel is often the dominant species in hard bottom areas. Due to the low salinity it reaches only the size of 3-4 cm in the North-Eastern Baltic Sea, while in optimum salinity conditions in the Danish Straits it can grow up to 8 cm. 1 m² of sea bed populated with mussels can purify 50-280 m³ of water in a day. Mussels are eaten by benthivoric fish and birds.

Baltic macoma is the most wide-spread species of zoobenthos on the soft bottoms of the Baltic Sea. It provides food for various fish species, such as cod.

These strange-looking fish live at the seabottom and can emit a low croaking sound when lifted from the water. They do not have a swim bladder, meaning that they sink as soon as they stop swimming. They prefer cold offshore waters and come closer to the coast only for spawning.



Furcellaria lumbricalis is a widespread red alga in the Baltic Sea. It has an industrial importance as a raw material for producing carrageen - a compound that is used in the food industry as a stabilizer and thickener in products like ice cream, pudding, and gelatinized items. Extracts of Furcellaria lumbricalis are also utilized in cosmetic products. Many fish species, among them the Baltic herring, use Furcellaria as spawning grounds.

Bladder wrack or fucus is a typical seaweed of the coastal areas of the Baltic Sea. It is a brown perennial alga that grows in the depth of 1 to 6 metres on hard rocky bottom. It forms most species-rich ecosystems in the Baltic Sea by providing habitat for some ten species of algae and 30 animal species.

Aquatic sowbag - a relic from late Ice Age that prefers cold deep waters. It often gets into herring trawls and can that way reach our kitchens together with herring.

Eelgrass or Zostera marina is a vascular plant forming eelgrass meadows that provide shelter and food for more than 20 animal species.

The poster has been prepared with the contribution of the LIFE financial instrument of the European Community in the frame of the project "Innovative approaches for marine biodiversity monitoring and assessment of conservation status of nature values in the Baltic Sea" (MARMONI, LIFE09 NAT/EE/000210). For more information: visit http://marmoni.balticseaportal.net

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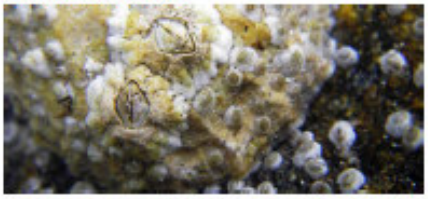
With the development of the ship traffic the alien species from other seas started to invade the Baltic Sea. By today, ca 120 alien species have travelled into the Baltic Sea mainly with the pilge water of ships, and ca 90 of them have adapted to local conditions. Some alien species have become invasive, i.e. their population in the new place is growing rapidly. Such invaders can change the local ecosystem and cause problems for people.

ALIEN SPECIES IN THE BALTIC SEA

Soft-shell clam - the oldest invader in the Baltic Sea who arrived here from North-America already with vikings in the 13th century.

Rockpool shrimp came with ships from North East Atlantic in the 1st half of the 20ieth century. It can have positive economic impacts through its use as food for commercial fish but also negative ecological impacts by displacing native shrimp species.



Bay barnacle came with ships from North America in the 19th century. It grows on rocks, man made structures, buoys, ships' hulls, the shells of crabs and molluscs, and certain seaweeds. It is an invasive species competing with native organisms and causing problems for humans by colonising different structures, blocking pipes etc.

Round goby arrived with ships from Caspian region in 1990ies and is spreading rapidly in the Baltic Sea. The round goby can displace native fish, eat their eggs and young, spawn multiple times a season, and survive in poor quality water - giving them a competitive advantage.

Harris mud crab is a is a small (ø 2cm) omnivorous crab native to Atlantic coast of North America. It is one of the most widely distributed crab species globally that is rapidly spreading now in the coastal areas of the Baltic Sea.

Red gilled mud worm or Marenzelleria comes also from the Atlantic coast of North America and is now one of the most common benthic species in the Northern Baltic Sea. Scientists have recently discovered that these worms can contribute to the binding of phosphorus in the sediments, reducing the eutrophication of the Baltic Sea and the risk of algal blooms.

The poster has been prepared with the contribution of the LIFE financial instrument of the European Community in the frame of the project 'Innovative approaches for marine biodiversity monitoring and assessment of conservation status of nature values in the Baltic Sea' (MARMONI, LIFE09 NAT/EE/000268). For more information visit http://marmonibalticsea.eu/en/

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