

## Sea Cliffs

Sea cliffs are a harsh environment. Subject to pounding waves, high winds and are largely unaccessible. They provide a habitat for only the toughest of animals and plants.

### Plants on Sea Cliffs

Some plants, for example Thrift, are ideally suited for growing on cliff faces. They must be tough enough to withstand the drying out affects of the sun and wind and have a strong root system to hold the plant in place during bad weather. Most plants are low growing to reduce exposure. Some plants can thrive on these cliffs due to the nutrients from the bird droppings. If droppings land on soil they provide the perfect base for new seeds to grow.

### Birds on Sea Cliffs

Cliffs provide a habitat for many birds such as gulls, shags, gannets, auks, fulmars and landbased birds such as ravens and choughs. For seabirds, being this close to the sea means they have a feeding area nearby at all times. Seabirds often form a large group or colony on a cliff face in order to breed. A colony could be made up of anything from five pairs of birds to thousands of pairs. The advantage of being in a large group or colony means that there are many eyes looking out for predators. Steep cliffs will keep away predators like foxes and otters and will also give the birds a good height from which to take off. Being part of a large colony however can be tough as there is added competition for food and space. Unfortunately young birds may also die in these exposed places, either by falling from the nest or by being blown off in bad weather.



For many reasons cliffs can be very dangerous.

They are constantly being worn away by wind, rain and waves and so parts of them may collapse at anytime. You should not climb them, go near the edge, throw things over or sit at the bottom of a cliff.



Shags, like other seabirds, build their nests on sea cliffs.



Gannets nest on cliffs and rocks in a colony called a gannetry.



When Fulmars are not nesting on the sea cliffs, they are out at sea.



Thrift, or Sea Pink, has a roundish button flower head and small, fleshy linear leaves.



Rock Samphire grows in any rocky crevice. It was once eaten as a vegetable, cooked or pickled.



Like other plants that grow on cliff, Kidney Vetch is also low-growing.

Photographs courtesy of Robbie Murphy & text reproduced from the DVD "On the Water's Edge".