

The Applecross Trust



Fact Sheet 2

Basking Shark (*Cetorhinus maximus*)

Dolphins, whales, grey and common seal, and basking shark have all been sighted from the shore around the Applecross coast. Basking shark, *Cetorhinus maximus*, is a national priority species and at up to ten metres in length and up to seven tonnes in weight it is Britain's largest fish species. Despite its size basking sharks have only minute teeth and feed on tiny zooplankton which they filter out with modified gill rakers from vast quantities of sea water passing through their enormous mouths.



They are migratory and found in most temperate waters of the world, appearing in the surface waters around the western coast of Britain from April to October, when mostly non-pregnant females are seen. It is thought that basking sharks come into our inshore waters not just to feed but to find partners for mating. Gestation may take 18 months to three years with females giving birth to five or six live young pups, each thought to be about one and a half metres at birth.

It is not totally clear where the sharks go in the winter; whether they move offshore into deep water and feed at a reduced level, or whether they stop feeding altogether and allow their gill rakers to regenerate.

The biggest threat to basking sharks lies in their highly valued, enormous fins, which are a delicacy in the Far East and the main reason for their continued hunting.

During the summer of 2006 The Wildlife Trusts' Basking Shark Project surveyed the west coast of Scotland and the Hebrides, which resulted in a number of new records for their database which contains identifiable characteristics of individual basking sharks and relies on a technique known as photo identification.

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