European native oyster
(Ostrea edulis)

THE WILD OYSTERS PROJECT
#WILDOYSTERS

LOCATION: Europe

Found around the coast from Norway to Morocco, and in the Mediterranean and Black Sea.

DIET:
Algae and organic particles (tiny pieces of animals and plants).

LIFESPAN:
Up to 15 years!

SIZE: 10–12cm…
…but some can grow to over 20cm!

HABITAT:
Mud and sand in saline (salty) water.

Oysters are bivalve molluscs.
Molluscs are a type of **invertebrate** (they do not have a backbone). Bivalve means they have two shells rather than one, like snails.

Oysters have been eaten in the UK since Roman times.
Oyster fishing has been happening in the UK for so long it has become a big part of the **local culture** in some areas

All oysters are born male, then change between male and female throughout their lives.
This is known as being a protandrous **hermaphrodite**.

Each adult female can produce around 1 million larvae per year!
Only a few of these baby oysters will survive to adulthood as many will be predated on.

One oyster can clean 200 litres of water per day!
They suck in water through valves like a hoover, and trap small food particles on tiny hairs (cilia) – this is called **filter feeding**.

Oysters create habitats for other living things.
Oysters live together in big groups, forming reefs (like coral reefs). These increase **biodiversity** by providing **food and shelter** for species such as sponges, crabs, eels and seahorses!

Native oyster reefs have declined by 95% in less than 200 years.
Oyster reefs are one of the most threatened marine habitats in Europe.

Overfishing, pollution, habitat loss, disease and **introduced species** have caused oyster populations to collapse.

Oyster adaptations

Adaptations are **physical features** or **behaviours** that help a species to **survive**.

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Hairs (cilia) and mucus to trap microscopic algae and small organic particles from the surrounding water.

Hard shell for protection against predators and to stop them drying up when the tide goes out.

Valves to suck in water and pass it over the gills.

Gills absorb oxygen from the water.

Produces lots of larvae to ensure that some survive to adulthood.

Strong muscles to close their shells quickly when threatened by predators.

Can change sex so there is always the right ratio of males to females.