

Key Stages 1 & 2: Reproduction – The Mating Game

Blue Reef is home to a wide range of vertebrates and invertebrates with many different reproductive strategies. This fascinating tour provides an insight into the varied world of marine reproduction. Among the highlights is a visit to the new nursery display where we run a thriving captive breeding programme. Recent success stories include sharks, rays, seahorses, pipefish, cuttlefish and many other creatures.

Sharks and Rays

Discover the different reproductive strategies sharks have adopted to survive. Students/pupils will have the opportunity to see real shark eggs and baby sharks to help them understand the process of reproduction and development. Blue Reef is also home to a variety of ray species - closely related to sharks and sharing similar reproductive patterns.

Seahorses and Pipefish

These bizarre fish have a highly unusual reproductive feature, as it is the males which become “pregnant” and carry the eggs in a specially-adapted pouch on their stomachs, while the females remain relatively uninvolved! Seahorses and their close relatives pipefish are among the marine world’s more attentive parents and it is believed pairs often remain together for life

Clownfish

As the film “Finding Nemo” explained, clownfish form mating pairs and both tend to the eggs. They often lay their eggs among the deadly stinging tentacles of sea anemones and spend time and energy defending the nest and “fanning” the eggs to keep oxygen levels up. Unlike the film however, there is no evidence for such devoted parental care following hatching.

Banggai cardinal Fish

These recently discovered black and white fish have a very unusual way of looking after their young. The male has a special pouch inside his mouth to keep the babies incubated and safe even after they have hatched. This is not at all common among fish species as many have the unpleasant habit of eating their own young!

Conger Eels

Conger eels only reproduce once in their lifetime, migrating to deep waters to spawn before they die. As they near the breeding grounds, their bodies undergo several radical changes. Their teeth fall out, their gut degenerates and the male’s gonads will grow to fill two thirds of their bodies!

Wrasse

The majority of wrasse fish have developed a highly individualised method of reproduction. Most wrasse are “born” females. When they reach a certain maturity, the largest and strongest female will turn into a male to fertilise the eggs when the other females spawn.