

LIVE

Teaching Through Nature



European Shag Behaviour

Shags do not migrate. However in the autumn/winter months most Shags living in Northern areas move along the coastline away from the areas where they nested in colonies. This is probably to search for sheltered areas to feed with lots of fish. Most birds will stay around the coast and gather in large flocks. Shags will roost each night on land on rocky outcrops, cliffs, harbour piers and sometimes even oil platforms. Shags do not breed inland. Sometimes strong storms might accidentally blow Shags inland, this is bad because they then become stranded without food and often die.



Shags only ever feed in the hours of daylight; this is known as diurnal feeding. They often search for food by themselves but they have been known to follow huge shoals of fish in flocks of more than 100 individuals!

Shags breed in colonies and it isn't unusual to find as many as 1,000 pairs of birds in a single colony but on Little Burhou and Burhou we only have 50 known breeding pairs. Every year the pairs of birds will return to the same nest site and, taking it in turns, one bird will stay present on the eggs or chicks throughout the entire breeding season! The nest is made up of marine vegetation such as seaweed and they build them on rocky ledges from as low as 8m (the average high tide point) to over 100m high or in caves on sea cliffs.

Shags prefer rocky marine habitats with deep clear water but are never found far from the land. They feed over sandy and rocky seabeds in search of fish and occasionally molluscs and crustaceans such as crabs. You can often see Shags diving for fish in sheltered areas such as harbours, bays and channels where the water is shallow and clear and are rarely seen within estuaries or fresh water areas.