



FUN FACT

Gannets can live up to 35 years!

Gannet

Scientific name: *Morus bassana*

Irish name: Gaínead

The northern gannet is a large species of sea-bird that hunts and breeds around Ireland's coastline and farther out to sea. They are easily recognized by their black-tipped wings and pale yellow head; they have a wing-span of up to 180cm. Gannets have excellent binocular vision which allows them to spot fish while hovering over the water; once they have spotted their prey they will fold in their wings and dive from a height of up to 40m, reaching speeds of up to 100kmph. They primarily feed on shoaling fish such as herring and mackerel, though they will also eat squid. Northern gannets have tiny air-sacs under their skin which help protect them from the impact of the water when they dive and allow them to quickly return to the surface more easily.



Gannets spend most of their lives at sea flying long distances to feed - as far as the Bay of Biscay in France or even West Africa. They form dense nesting colonies called "gannetries" on cliffs and rocky islands between March and September each year. Each breeding pair will build a nest using seaweed and mud, and lay a single egg in April/May and incubate it for six to seven weeks. It takes about four years for a young gannet to become fully mature. Gannet colonies can be found on Great Saltee, Co. Wexford, the Bull Rock, Co. Cork and on Little Skellig in Co. Kerry. Check out [this great video](#) of gannets.

Actions:

- How does marine litter affect sea-birds? Do a project to investigate this.
- Find out where gannet colonies are located and where they migrate to – create a map!
- Go on a bird-watching trip to a coastal area, bring binoculars and see what birds you can identify!