

## The bit for grown ups....

This interactive 5km Tale Trail explores the wonderful wilderness of South Walney Nature Reserve. Use the map and nature reserve leaflet to help you find your way and spot features from the story. The route mainly follows the red way markers in a clockwise direction from the car park. There is a shortcut across the blue way-marked oyster farm track if little legs are getting tired.

**Access:** The nature reserve is an undisturbed haven for wildlife so please stay on trails and do not access the beaches at any time.

**Dogs:** Unfortunately dogs are not allowed (except guide dogs) due to the vulnerability of the wildlife here.

**Facilities:** Fantastic picnic area next to the car park and make sure you sign in and visit the Curiosity Cabin, full of island treasures!

**Safety:** South Walney can be windy and wild and feel remote in places so make sure you pack appropriate clothing and something to eat and drink before you set off. Take a mobile phone if you have one too.

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## The Eiderling

Under the light of a May moon four little eider chicks made their way down to the shingle beach of Walney Island ... one little eiderling did not.

Darwin was snuggled up in his soft, downy nest and was quite happy to carry on snoozing. "Come on!" shouted his brothers and sisters, "it's a beautiful evening," but Darwin would not budge. At 10 weeks old most of the chicks had left the nest and begun exploring but Darwin stayed well and truly put ... until summer!

"It's time for you to leave the nest now, Darwin," said his mum. "Time for you to spread your wings and go on some adventures of your own." Darwin snuggled into his mum's downy feathers a little closer. "You are a mighty sea duck, Darwin, the sprinter of the duck world ... a great diver and great hunter too. Eider Island can't be your home forever."

"I WANT TO BE A PIRATE!" said Darwin determinedly. "I want to sail the seven seas and hunt for treasure!"

Eider mums sit on the eggs for four weeks and don't eat a thing! When the eggs hatch, eider mums and aunts protect the delicate chicks by forming a crèche around them for the first few weeks.

Darwin's mum looked a little shocked. "Well, my darling, you might need to explore the seven lands of Walney first ... just before you set sail."

"I really want to, Mum, but I'm scared of the other animals, I don't understand what they are saying. They make strange noises and some of them look frightening too, especially the black dinosaur bird on The Great Ocean."

Male eiders throw their heads back and say "coo oooo" when they see a female they like. It sounds like they are saying "I love you!"

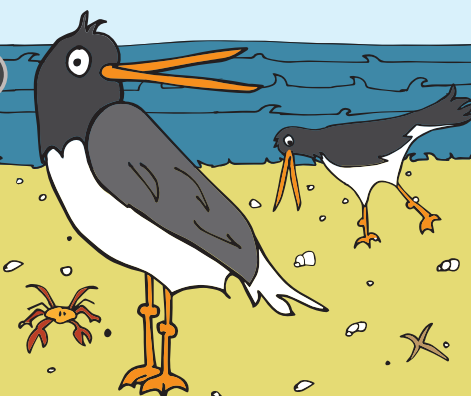


"Well, Darwin, we are very lucky here at South Walney as we don't get disturbed by many folks, so it's a great place for you to watch the other creatures and start to understand them a little. Watch how they move and talk to each other ... it's a bit like cracking a secret code! Why don't you start with someone who lives nearby ... the oystercatcher ...

"Peep peep," said the oystercatcher, who was walking around on Shingle Beach, next door to Eider Island. He looked like he was searching for something special and didn't seem scary at all. "Maybe he's looking for treasure," thought Darwin. The oystercatcher was black and white with a long, bright orange beak. "Peep peep," he said again as he turned to face Darwin, who became a quivering ball of fluff.

"I'm g-g-g-going to be black and white like you when I'm older but with a green n-n-neck," stuttered Darwin. The oystercatcher nodded and waded over.

Please don't go onto the beaches – it is really important that the fragile animals and plants are not disturbed. You can see beach-finds like these in the Curiosity Cabin and also on other beaches around Walney Island



He started to comb the beach with his long beak, finding little snacks in the sand. Darwin watched and then had a go himself. "Are we hunting for pirate treasure?" asked Darwin. "Peep peep," said the oystercatcher and flew off out to sea. Darwin smiled to himself and carried on exploring Shingle Beach. He found mermaid's purses and beautiful shells, and began to feel just a little bit like a pirate.

Now Darwin was feeling a little bit more courageous, so he decided to venture further away from home. He walked past the finger pools and waved to the otters and spotted some amazing yellow flowers by the path ... this was getting exciting! He sat looking over Lighthouse Bay and noticed a beautiful tall bird with bright red legs wading through the mudflats. He saw that she often pushed her long beak into the muddy sand and wondered what she was doing.

As he sat watching and listening carefully a little caterpillar crawled onto his shoulder. "Ahoy there, matey," said the little hairy creature. "Need a shipmate?" Darwin stared at his new pal and nodded with a big, beaky smile. "My name's Master Fuzz and I be pleased to be of service to you, sir. Those be redshanks you're looking at and curlews too. Can you hear them talking to each other?" "Oooo ee oooo ee," said the birds with the long, curved beaks. "They be looking for delicious snacks in the five-star mud restaurant out there, no doubt," said Fuzz confidently. Darwin watched as the wading birds snacked on worms, shellfish and shrimps, sucking them up out of the mudflats. His tummy began to rumble a bit.

Fuzz passed Darwin a pair of tiny binoculars and pointed out towards The Spit. "See those sea pigs over yonder, mighty gurt big creatures that they are? Well, they eat the same food as you, shellfish and the like." Darwin watched

Seals eat mussels, clams, sea urchins, starfish and crabs just like eiders.

Eiders can eat a clam whole, crushing the shells with their gizzard (the thick, muscular part of a bird's stomach) - now who's the scary one?!

Don't pick up or touch fuzzy caterpillars as their spiny hairs are quite irritating.

the seals, or sea pigs as Fuzz called them, hauling themselves up onto the beach and felt very tiny in comparison. "They can hold their breath for 20 minutes, I've been told."

Darwin watched in wonder as the seals barked at each other. "Every good pirate needs to know where to haul up to rest once in a while, so it's worth watching those sea pigs for seafaring tips," said Fuzz knowingly.

Darwin wanted to see how the seals swam so he bravely popped his head under the water at high tide and amazingly managed to hold his breath for two whole minutes! The seals seemed to use their whiskers to help them find food and chatted to each other using all sorts of different sounds like growls, hisses, grunts and clicks. Sometimes they would smack the water with their tails when they were angry, which looked a bit scary but really it was just a warning for folks to stay back.



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"Why don't you have a swim too?" asked Fuzz. "Eiders are the best diving sea ducks I know of. Go on, show them your strong tail rudder."

Darwin shook his head and folded his arms defiantly. "Shiver me tail feather, Fuzz, I'm not going in there."

Darwin and Fuzz headed around the bay to Gull Meadow, passing amazing giant mushrooms (called parasol mushrooms), sweet-smelling sea lavender and a strange old building from times gone by. There were hundreds of gulls, making "Caw caw ooo eeee" sounds. They squawked as they zoomed and dived overhead. "They don't mean us much harm, Darwin, but you'd better listen to what they are saying as they don't take kindly to intruders around their home."

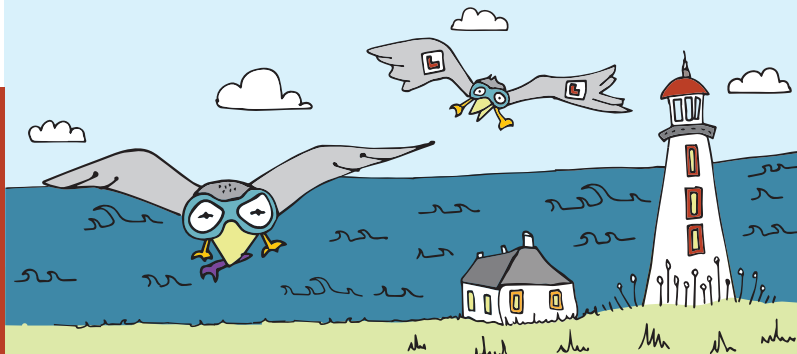
Darwin watched suspiciously. He had heard many tales about seagulls stealing chicks – and pooping on folks from above! As they sat watching quietly from the marram grass Darwin noticed that the gulls made a "ha ha ha" sound and

Have you ever had your chips mugged by a gull or been pooped on from above?

Yes, they fight and squabble and even eat each other's eggs but they are just trying to survive like the rest of us. Gulls stamp their feet to mimic rain so that worms come up, and they can even drink salt water!

leaned forward when someone walked by, and a "yeow yeow" shriek before diving. Maybe this was their way of saying they had spotted something they didn't like!

"Some of your kind nest in the gull meadow too, Darwin, so the gulls can't be all that bad! These gulls come all the way from Africa to breed on South Walney so it must be a very special place. Let's hope it stays that way."



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The buccaneer pair ventured on through the dunes and Marvellous Meadows, and watched all sorts of amazing creatures ... gatekeeper butterflies fluttered around like secret spies, skylarks filled the sky with the most marvellous song, and sheep and cows munched happily in the summer sun. The skylarks seemed to mimic the call sounds of different birds whilst flying at full speed. "Maybe that's their sea shanty?" asked Darwin. "Maybe we need one too!" said Fuzz ...

The eiderling and me sailed o'er the sea  
To hunt for treasures gold

The sky was blue and we were too  
As it was bloomin' cold

We set our sails and turned our tails  
To venture places new

But after a day afloat on the sway  
Back to the nest we flew!

Darwin chuckled cheekily and Fuzz snuggled into his downy feathers a little bit more. "There's one more creature I'd like you to meet, Darwin," said Fuzz, pointing out towards The Great Ocean. The sun was beginning to set and on the horizon stood a huge creature with outstretched wings and magnificent black, shiny feathers. "Eeeek ... it's the d-d-d dinosaur bird!" stuttered Darwin, stooping down nervously into the marram grass. "He does look a bit scary but really he is just drying his wings so he can dive for food again," said Fuzz. "They know things, those sea ravens," he added, winking at Darwin. "Let's visit him."

Gatekeeper butterflies are beautiful golden butterflies that are seen on the nature reserve in summer



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The pair walked cautiously towards the waves of The Great Ocean and the cormorant watched them from the ocean's edge. He turned to face them...

"The gatekeeper butterfly tells me that a brave little eiderling called Darwin is training to be a pirate."

Darwin nodded whilst keeping his eyes fixed on the cormorant's hooked beak.

"The gatekeeper butterfly tells me that the eiderling is learning quickly. I think to feel like a pirate you need to look like a pirate."

Darwin nodded respectfully again. The cormorant opened his beak and from under his wing brought out a diamond-

encrusted eye patch and a pirate flag which said 'THE EIDERLING' in big, bold letters.

"Now go and sail the seven seas, my friend," said the mighty cormorant before diving under the crashing waves. Darwin and Fuzz smiled at each other and stood just a little bit taller.

"I think we need to go and find my crew," said Darwin as they headed back towards Eider Island. Fuzz nodded humbly and saluted his very best shipmate.

"Aye aye, captain!"





# The Eiderling



## Disclaimer

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