

Beach Combing & Rock Pooling

The seas around the UK have the potential to be among the most productive and wildlife-rich on Earth. However they are severely threatened by human disregard for these fragile habitats. Our seas have a remarkable ability to recover from damage but only if we give them a chance. We hope to raise awareness of the damage that pollution causes marine habitats and reduce human impact. In this way we can create living seas where marine wildlife thrives.

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The sea shore is the most accessible habitat of the marine environment. There are a number of interesting things that can be seen, below are some of the more common ones.

High Tide - the strandline is where things collect washed up by the sea at very high tides.

Mermaids purses

I am the egg cases of skates, dogfish and rays and can be found washed up on the beach. I am 2-10cm long, roughly rectangular with a bulge in the middle being the egg case of a dogfish, I have long tendrils that help the capsule attach to seaweed. My egg capsule is tough enough to survive the 5-11 months needed before I hatch.



Common Mussel *Mytilus edulis*

My shell is smooth but marked with circular lines and looks similar to a triangle in shape. I am often found in groups with other mussels on rocky beaches. I grow between 5-10cms in height. I am usually purple or blue in colour but sometimes brown. I live attached to rocks using threads, these help me stay on the rock when waves hit.



Common whelk egg cases

I am the empty egg cases of the common whelk, although I can look like a piece of bubble wrap. I can be seen as large clumps of eggs on rocks in the sea, and sometimes I get washed up onto beaches. If I am grey when you find me the whelks have already hatched, but if I am pale yellow in colour, the whelks are still inside. I can be found during the breeding season, which runs from October to May depending on the locality. Egg masses can contain up to 2,000 or more egg capsules.

Slipper limpet

I am a non native species of limpet that has become well establish along the coastline. My shell is kidney shaped, smooth and gently curved, I am around 5cm in length and vary in colour from white through yellow to green-brown, occasionally with purple-pink patches. I can sometimes be seen in a chain of ten or more individuals. The individual at the top of the chain is female and the one at the bottom is male. All the others are somewhere in between! In fact as slipper limpets we have the ability to change sex. This chain adds protection from predators and provides extra weight to prevent us from being washed away by strong currents.

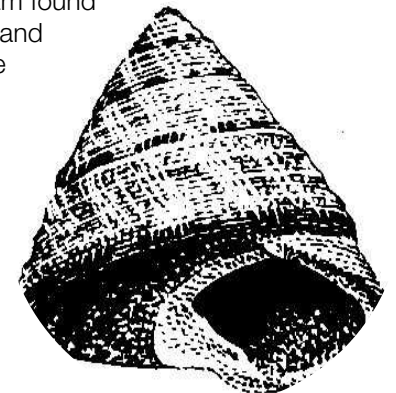
Cuttlefish bones

I am the main feature that differentiates the cuttlefish from the squid, as I am a gas-filled bone which allows the animal to be buoyant in water. I am made from mineral calcium carbonate. The finely chambered spaces allow the amount of gas-to-water to be regulated by the cuttlefish, in order to achieve the correct level of buoyancy. These bones are frequently found washed up on beaches, as remnants of the animal.



Painted top shells *Calliostoma zizyphinum*

I have a conical shell with straight-sided whorls. I am usually about 3cm in height and 3cm wide. I vary in colour, but am often greyish-pink or yellow with red stripes, occasionally I can be all white. I am widely found low down on the shore on fairly sheltered rocky beaches. I am found attached to rocks and under stones. I like to eat microorganisms and detritus.



Low Tide – lots of animals and plants shelter in the rock pools that may be exposed during low tides

Edible Crab *Cancer pagurus*

I am usually quite wide and can reach more than 20cms across. My carapace has three small lobes found between my eyes and about 10 round lobes on my margins, making my outline look like a 'pie-crust' in appearance. I like to live in rock pools and on gravel bottoms. I like to live under rocks and buried in the sand on the low shore. I am reddish-brown in colour. I like to eat lots of things, but mussels are my favourite.



Beadlet anemone

Actinia equina

I have a fat, round base that sticks to hard surfaces. From this I have a smooth stalk that holds up to 192 tentacles arranged in 6 circles. If I am disturbed I retract my tentacles and hide away. I am usually red, brown, green or orange in colour. I like to live in rock pools attached to hard surfaces.



Common Hermit Crab *Pagurus bernhardus*

Pagurus bernhardus

I am usually 2.5-10cms in length. I have a soft body but no hard shell of my own to protect it. I like to live in empty shells found on the beach to help protect my body. These are usually empty common whelk and netted dog whelk shells. I am usually found in rock pools. I am red, brown or yellow in colour. I scavenge for food but also filter the water around me.



Common Starfish *Asterias rubens*

I am the most common starfish in this area. I have five long arms which turn upwards at the ends when I am active. I am usually 10-30cms wide but sometimes can reach up to 52cms. I like to stick to the surface of rocks or among seaweed. I move around using little tube feet located underneath my body. I can be found in many different colours, but my favourites are orange, pale brown or violet. I like to feed on bivalves, such as mussels.



Strawberry anemone

Actinia fragacea

I have a smooth column and look quite similar to a beadlet anemone. I am reddish-brown in colour with green spots that make me look like a strawberry, that's how I got my name. I am quite fat in shape and can be as wide as 10cms. I like to live on rocks and stones on the lower shore.

Common Limpet *Patella vulgata*

I have a pointy shell that can grow up to 6cms tall. I have a wide base that allows my foot to stick firmly to hard surfaces, such as rocks. This helps me to keep water inside my shell and hide from animals that might like to eat me. I am often a variety of colours, ranging from white, grey, yellow to dark greenish-grey. The colour of my shell often helps me camouflage with the surface I am living on. I eat using a rasping tongue, my favourite food is algae.



When you are out and about by the coast don't forget to follow the seashore code.

Seashore Code of Conduct

1. Wear sensible footwear and take care, as rocks can be very slippery.
2. Keep away from the foot of cliffs to avoid falling rocks.
3. Always check the tide times as it is easy to get cut off by an in-coming tide.
4. Respect the marine wildlife and habitat, do not take live specimens and avoid trampling and unnecessary disturbance.
5. Don't paddle or throw things in rockpools – remember they are creatures homes.
6. Always put rocks back in the same place and the same way up as they were when you found them.
7. Don't pull seaweed off the rocks.
8. Keep away from soft mud and quicksand.
9. Take your litter home or dispose of it carefully in bins, if provided.

Images: mermaid purse & cuttlefish bone / Dave Kilby; common mussel, edible crab, beadlet anemone, common hermit crab, common starfish & common limpet / Paul Naylor; painted top shell / Natural England