

Marine Life on Sandy Shores



Common Shore Crab *Carcinus maenas*

Concealed among the tide wrack and masters of disguise, crabs can be difficult to find.

Common shore crabs are found on both rocky and sandy shores. Often small and varying in colour from green to orange.

Velvet swimming and spider crabs are common in our shallow coastal waters, but less frequently encountered on our beaches.



Great Spider Crab
Hyas araneus

Hermit Crab
Pagurus bernhardus

Look for hermit crabs among the seaweed hidden in whelk shells.



Small-spotted Catshark egg case *Scyliorhinus canicula*

Mermaid's purses (the egg cases of sharks and rays), sea wash-balls (empty egg cases of the common whelk) and the fragile shells of sea potatoes (heart urchins) are just part of the strange and wondrous clues to the life hidden in our shallow coastal waters. Beachcombing is a great way to start discovering the enormous range of life forms that live in our coastal waters. This leaflet will help you take the first steps into a fascinating world that is hidden beneath the waves.

Common Whelk egg mass
Buccinum undatum



Sea Potato
Echinocardium cordatum

Who could resist a walk along one of the beautiful beaches of the Outer Hebrides?

The prevailing winds from the south west and the currents of the North Atlantic Drift deposit a treasure trove of seaweed, marine animals and assorted flotsam and jetsam on our beaches.

Each beach is unique and the type of animals or their remains which get washed up on the shore depends on the location of the beach, its aspect and exposure to the wind and currents.

Whether you chose to beachcomb along the strandline or meander along the tide edge, the animals you find will give you an insight into the local marine environment.

Most of us look for seashells, but there are other forms of marine life to be encountered on the beach. From the beautiful to the bizarre, these sea creatures have fascinating life styles and are adapted to live in a challenging environment.

The strandline is more than just a collection of debris, it provides shelter and food for a range of invertebrates from sand-hoppers to seaweed flies which in turn become an important food source for gulls and wading birds.

There is the inevitable presence of human debris, everything from driftwood to plastic bottles. Plastic is a serious pollutant of the marine environment, but it is worth examining as it may hide some interesting and often exotic marine life.

Further information:
www.ohbr.org.uk



Outer Hebrides Biological Recording

Photographs © Chris Johnson





Common Starfish *Asterias rubens*



Spiny Starfish
Marthasterias glacialis



Bloody Henry Starfish
Henricia oculata

Common starfish are often washed up onto the beach after stormy weather. There are other species to be found which vary in size and colour. They're often alive so please return them to the sea.

Sand Star *Astropecten irregularis*



Moon Jellyfish
Aurelia aurita



Blue Jellyfish
Cyanea lamarckii



Compass Jellyfish
Chrysaora hysoscella



Lion's Mane Jellyfish
Cyanea capillata

Most of the jellyfish we find live in coastal waters but can be driven ashore by strong winds. Stranded on the beach it is difficult to appreciate the beauty of jellyfish. In the water the translucent dome of jelly floats, displaying long, trailing tentacles. It is wise not to handle jellyfish as the stings in the tentacles are still active in the stranded animals.

By-the-wind sailors are related to jellyfish and comprise a group of animals which form an oval disc with a blue skirt and tentacles. These are pelagic animals and commonly found on the surface of the warmer oceanic waters. They are occasionally washed-up on our beaches in large numbers.



By-the-wind Sailor
Velella velella



Common Goose Barnacle *Lepas anatifera*

Stalked barnacles are related to the encrusting barnacles we see on rocks. They are oceanic animals which attach to drifting objects by a long flexible stalk. The shell plates protect the feathery feeding legs (cirri).

Buoy barnacles are found in warmer waters and are often washed ashore with by-the-wind sailors. They are often attached to seaweed or feathers, but can also form their own spongy float.

Buoy Barnacle *Dosima fascicularis*

