

Crazy Rock Pool Creatures

On the land, animal activity depends on the time of day, as some animals are nocturnal whilst others are active in the day. It also varies with the seasons of the year. Many animals have their young in the spring and summer when it is warmer and there is more food about, perhaps hibernating or migrating in the winter.

In the sea this is different. For creatures which live in the shallow waters around our coastline, called the **littoral** zone, the **tide** is very important. The tide is controlled by the moon. There are, roughly two low and two high tides a day and all our rock pool creatures need to feed when they have water (high tide) and find a rock pool or somewhere else to hide when the tide is out.

Here are just a few fascinating rock pool creatures you may have seen on a day out at the beach.



©Paul Naylor

Hermit crabs have tough claws but unlike other crabs their backs are really quite soft which means they need extra protection from predators. Hermit crabs find other empty shells, winkles, or whelks etc. which are the right size for them and basically carry their protective house on their back! If a hungry gull comes along they crawl back inside and hide. When they get bigger they grow out of their shell & have to find a new one. Sometimes hermit crabs of different sizes will all line up small to large and swop shells. How clever is that?!



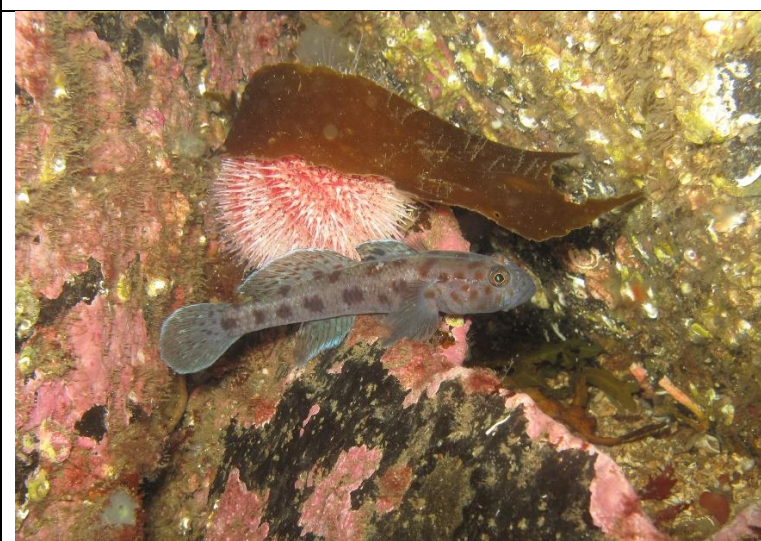
©Anna Guthrie

Beadlet Anemone have lovely deep red tentacles and blue beadlets around the bottom of the tentacles. They use these tentacles to sting and eat small fish and other small creatures. At Low tide the tentacles are retracted inside their body to stop them drying out leaving what looks like a blob of red jelly attached to the rocks. The shell you can see in this photo is a **limpet**, the animal inside is like a snail. The even smaller shell is a **barnacle** which like the anemone, filter feeds for very small creatures.



©Lizzy Wilberforce

The **Common Starfish** is sadly not so common now a days. Star fish have a very strong grip. It uses hundreds of tinny tentacles to stick onto rocks or hold its prey, like mussels and clams which it then pulls open. They have a very bazar way of eating. A starfish extends its stomach out of its mouth and over its dinner then begins to digest it! If a starfish loses a leg it will grow back but it takes a while so please be very careful if you handle one, better still just take a photo.



©Polly Whyte

There are about 17 species of **Goby** found around the UK. This one is a leopard Spotted Goby. The rock goby is able to change colour and brightness within a minute to camouflage itself from predators! Behind this goby you will spot a very prickly **Sea Urchin**. They attached themselves to rocks with tinny suckers which they also use to move around. There is an opening below with 5 claw like structures used to eat algae and other things from the rocks.



©Paul Naylor

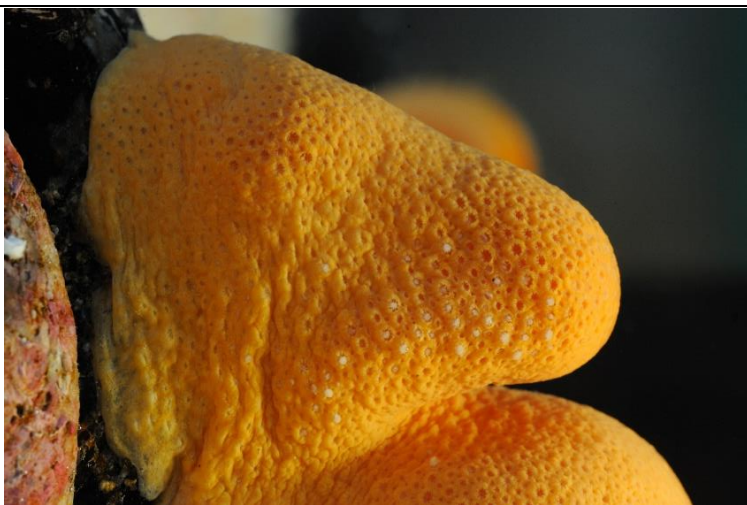
This is a **Whelk** laying its eggs. You may find the old whelk egg cases washed up on the beach. They feel a bit like puffed rice.

Whelks eat other shells and worms, even other whelks. They can use their foot to pull shells open or their tinny teeth called radula to drill a hole into their prey. They look harmless enough but they know how to get in to their diner!



©Paul Naylor

There are more than 62 species of crab in the UK but the **Shore Crab** is one of the commonest. Crabs moult their old shells as they grow. Sometimes when you find what looks like a dead crab it is actually an old shell left by a crab which outgrew it. The freshly moulted crab is then soft for a while until it shells hardens and so needs to keep hidden from predators like gulls. Female crabs carry their eggs, which are bright orange, underneath them until they hatch into little planktonic larvae.



©Amy Lewis

Though many **Sponges** look more like a plant than an animal they are in fact animals. Unlike other animals they do not have organs (things like a heart, a stomach or lungs). Early biologists thought they were plants because they didn't seem to move but they do move very slowly. They feed by filtering very tinny creatures, out of the water and absorbing them.