Millport Rockpools

Its really good fun investigating rockpools. There are lots of interesting sea creatures to discover. Please use this simple guide to find out what can lurk in Millport rockpools, but please read the safety information before you start.

SEASHORE & SAFETY

PLEASE always take photos, and not live specimens. Leave animals where you found them.

ALWAYS carefully replace overturned rocks and seaweeds as you found them.

AVOID removing seaweed from the rocks, it can take many years to grow back.

MAKE sure a shell is empty before taking it home.

PLEASE take your litter home with you, or place in rubbish bins.

REPORT anything unusual washed up on the beach to the coastguards.

LOOK out for your safety at all times; check the tide timetables before you start.

CHILDREN should always be accompanied by an adult.

ROCKS are very slippery be very careful.

NEVER go onto the rocks when the tide is coming in and check constantly.

DO NOT handle sea creatures, some can sting & cause severe reactions.

MILLPORT ROCKPOOLS

The most accessible rock-pools in Millport are alongside Crocodile Rock. Within these rock-pools you can see a variety of sea creatures ranging from sea anenomes to hermit crabs. The next few pages give you an insight into what you can see. But make sure you follow the seashore and safety guidelines before you start.

The rockpools near Crocodile Rock. Pictured when the tide is coming in.

BEADLET ANENOME

These anenomes are usually red but can be green or brown.They look like blobs of jelly when the tide is out but extend their tentacles out when the tide comes back in.These are animals and not plants and have stinging cells in their tentacles which they fire out into their prey to paralyse it, the tentacles can then move the food to their mouth in the centre These animals can eat small prawns and fish

SNAKELOCKS ANENOME

These anemones cannot retract their tentacles and so are usually found in rockpools where they remain in water even when the tide goes out.They use their stinging cells to catch their prey like the beadlet anemone. The green colour of the tentacles is due to algae living in the tissues of the anemone. Some anemones are light brown because they don't contain algae Although the sting of the anemones is not sufficient to harm humans, some people with sensitive skin may get a rash, so it's best not to touch the tentacles of any anemones.

Millport's Rock Pool Guide

STRAWBERRY ANENOME

These look like larger versions of the beadlet anemone, but they have lots of green/yellow spots on the main body (so they look like strawberries). They like to keep out of light and heat and so are often found under overhangs and in crevices.

BARNACLES Although it doesn't look like it, these animals are related to prawns and crabs. When they are larvae, they settle on a rock and cement their head to it. They then build a shell around themselves and close themselves in. When the tide comes in they open a 'trapdoor' at the top of their shell and stick their feathery legs out into the water to catch particles of food that float past.

COMMON PRAWNS

Prawns are see-through when in the rockpools and this helps them to be able to blend into their surroundings more easily and not get eaten. Their eyes are on the top of their heads so they have better vision to see if they are under threat. They have two sets of of legs, one for walking and one for swimming

EDIBLE CRAB These are an orange / brown colour and look like a pasty with their crimped edge They are difficult to spot as they often wedge themselves into a crevice. They will grow quite quickly and can reach 30cm across! They have very large pincers which they use to crush and eat mussels and marine snails.

HERMIT CRAB

This crab is the only one not to have its own shell. They live in the empty shells of dog whelks, topshells or periwinkles. As they grow larger they need to find new shells to live in and will even rip another hermit crab out of a shell if they want it enough.

SHORE CRAB

These are very common and are usually green but can be brown or orange They can be recognised by the jagged edge to the front of their shell. They grow to about 10cm across the carapace (shell). Like most crustaceans they have to moult their shell every so often as they grow bigger. This usually happens about 4 times in the first year alone.

VELVET SWIMMING CRAB

Also known as the devil's crab, look out for their bright red eyes. They are very aggressive so we don't recommend trying to handle them. If you are able to find an empty 'moulted' shell, you will feel that their carapace has a soft velvety feel which gives the crab its name.

PIPE FISH These long fish may also take some looking for as they look quite like pieces of seaweed. Pipefish look like straightened out elongated seahorse (to which they are related) and it is the male pipefish which broods the eggs. You may find these hiding under rocks at low tide

SHANNY

These common rockpool fish are difficult to spot as they speed across the rockpools and hide. Instead of scales they have smooth breathable skin and can stay out of water in damp places for quite a while They have very sharp teeth so keep your fingers clear.They often use their sharp teeth to bite the legs off an unsuspecting barnacle!

DOG WHELK This is a carnivorous animal that has a 'drill' like tongue which they use to drill a hole in the shell of a mussel, limpet or barnacle. When they have drilled a hole through the shell, they use acidic liquid to dissolve the body of the animal inside. They can then 'suck' up their meal. This process takes a long time and so they may get washed off in the tide before they are able to get their meal.

LIMPETS These common creatures can live up to 20 years and are very important for the ecology of the seashore. They slide around when the tide is in scraping seaweed off the rocks with their rough tongue. When the tide goes out, limpets return to exactly the same spot and this is called their home scar. They can grind down the rock with their shell to get a nice tight fit so that they are able to retain moisture until the tide comes back in.

MUSSELS These animals like areas of rapid water movement and there you will find them in abundance. They are filter feeders and when the tide comes in, they will open slightly to allow water and food to pass through. Mussels attach themselves to the rock using strong threads, called byssus threads

PERIWINKLE

Periwinkles are grazing herbivores, most of them eating microscopic seaweed (invisible to the naked eye). They are found at all levels of the shore . At the top of the shore (furthest from the sea), the rough periwinkle can be found whereas further down the shore, the edible periwinkle dominates.

CUSHION STARFISH

These can be very difficult to spot as they are very small, only a few centimetres across. They are usually an orange / green colour. These animals are scavengers and feed on decaying animal /plant matter. They all begin life as males, maturing at 2 years old, and then at age of 4 they become female!. They usually live for up to 7 years. They may be found hiding in seaweed or underneath stones on the lower shore (near the sea at low tide). Underneath their legs are lots of tiny

Produced by John Taberner on behalf of the Isle of Cumbrae Tourist Association. For more information about the Isle of Cumbrae view the website on: WWW.MILLPORT.ORG .