



BEACHCOMBING ON KANGAROO ISLAND

Beachcombing is a great way to get to know Kangaroo Island's beaches. Looking at what the sea has washed ashore is a fun and educational activity for adults and children alike.

Low tide is often the best time to visit one of the Island's many beaches as more plants and animals are washed up, rock pools are exposed and birds are often feeding. If you turn over any rocks please replace them gently to protect the animals and their habitat. All plants and animals in intertidal rocky reefs are protected in all coastal waters in South Australia.

There are lots of interesting things to look out for no matter which beach you find yourself on. Shells, shark egg cases, bones, seaweed, corals and other sea life can all be found along Kangaroo Island's beaches, along with interesting rocks, pieces of smooth sea glass and driftwood.

Here are things to look for on your beachcombing adventures.

Port Jackson shark egg cases

These brown, spiral-shaped egg cases are quite distinctive. Female Port Jackson sharks wedge them into gaps between rocks, where they harden and can stay for up to a year before the baby shark hatches. Sometimes they are dislodged by storms and end up on the beach. They range in size from 5 to 15 cm long.

Moon snail sacks

Commonly known as 'sausage blubbers' or 'jelly blubbers', these clear, c-shaped jellies are actually masses of moon snail eggs. The adult moon snail is a small brown and fawn snail that hunts in intertidal areas for little bivalve creatures.

Abalone shells

Abalone have one flattish shell with a row of holes along one side to help them breathe. Rough on the outside, they're pearly and beautiful inside, and when they're alive they clamp onto rocks using a muscular foot.

Razorfish

Razorfish are a bivalve, meaning they have two shells instead of one. They can live for 15 years and grow up to half a metre long. They live in groups in sandy or muddy sediments, and true to their name, the edges of their shells can be very sharp if you step on them.

Anemone cones

Anemone cones are cone shells, measuring up to about 5 cm long, that are found all around the Kangaroo Island coast. They are predatory molluscs that use a miniature poison dart to paralyse and catch worms on the seafloor. The live snail could give a person a painful sting, but the empty shell is not dangerous.

Cuttlefish bones

Anyone who has had a pet budgie is probably familiar with cuttlefish bones, as they are traditionally given to caged birds to sharpen their beaks. Cuttlefish come from the same order as octopus and squid. They are soft-bodied creatures with 8 arms and 2 long tentacles to catch food, and the white 'bone' is actually an internal shell that helps them float.

Tapeweed fibre ball

When Tapeweed, a type of seagrass, breaks down in the sea the fibres can roll together in the waves to form balls. They're like cat fur-balls of the sea! In some areas they can be as big as soccer balls.

Sponges

Sponges may look like plants, but they are actually simple animals with a skeleton made from a fibrous material called spongin. They come in many shapes and sizes, and extract food by pumping sea water through their pores.

Sea urchins

Sea urchins are spiky little creatures with sharp teeth for eating algae, and tiny feet to move around. They are usually found on reefs or seagrass, but if they are washed ashore, their spines are usually broken off along the way. The rounded shell that is left behind is known as a 'test'.

Surf crabs

Also known as sand crabs, surf crabs are a greyish colour and grow to about 10 cm across, with 2 red dots on their shells that look like eyes. As they grow, they discard their old shells and grow new ones, so empty shells often wash up on the beach.

Blue periwinkle

A small snail (to 1cm) that lives in groups on rocks in the highest part of intertidal reefs. These snails are herbivorous and eat lichen. When the rocks are dry the snails protect themselves from drying out by clustering together in crevices and depressions in the rock.

Warrener or turban shell

Round, edible snails that have a dark green and white zig-zag pattern on the shell. They are found in large numbers on many reefs and are a food source for Pacific gulls, which pick them up and drop them from a height onto rocks to smash the hard shell. The white 'trapdoor' (operculum) protects the soft animal inside and is often washed up on beaches

Velvet sea star

Also known by divers as 'Patrick' from SpongeBob Squarepants, velvet sea stars are commonly seen on shallow reefs and down to about 60 m deep. The velvet sea star is quite large, measuring up to 16 cm across. They have smooth skin, usually red, orange or cream with red mottling. Rings of little sacs called papillae protrude from the skin surface, which allow gas exchange, like breathing.

Paper 'nautilus' / argonaut egg case

Argonaut octopus live in the open ocean, from the shallows to around 100m deep. The female creates a sculptured case using membranes in her arms. The delicate case protects the eggs whilst they develop, and the female stays in the case during that time. Empty egg cases are sometimes washed ashore after winter storms.

For more information:

Beachcombers guide: <https://cdn.environment.sa.gov.au/parks/docs/adelaide-dolphin-sanctuary/beachcombers-guide.pdf>

Beachcombing identification chart: <https://cdn.environment.sa.gov.au/landscape/docs/hf/nrmeducation-beachcombing-chart-2019-gen.pdf>