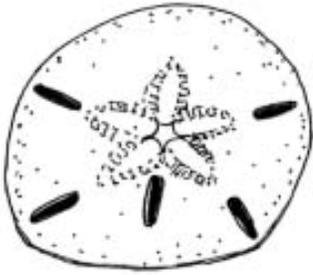


N.C. Plant and Animal Species Fact Sheets



Keyhole Urchin (sand dollar) (*Mellita quinqüesperforata*)

Introduction

These creatures are commonly known as "sand dollars" because some of them have a flattened disklike shape that resembles a silver dollar. If you are very lucky you may see one of these washed up on the beach, but usually they have died and the only thing you find is the leftover "teste" which is a ghostly white color. The true sand dollar is a similar species. It is found here but it is much less common.

What do they look like?

Keyhole urchins are a flat echinoderm with fuzzy coating of fine spines, and 5 slitlike holes in their exoskeleton, or teste. They are usually golden brown with a greenish tint. They move through a coordinated effort of the spines. This is different from other echinoderms like seastars and sea urchins which move more with their tube feet.

How big are they?

Keyhole urchins are fairly round with a diameter of 3-5" (8cm - 13cm.)

Where do they live?

They mostly live in the subtidal areas of estuaries but can be found more than a 1/2 mile deep in the ocean. They require a sandy bottom with limited ocean energy which

means they will not live where there are lots of waves.

Who eats them?

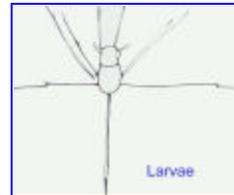
Flounders, cod, seastars and other bottom feeding fish eat keyhole urchins.

What do they eat?

These animals feed on microorganisms on the bottom. As they move on the sand the tube feet funnel food to the central mouth, where it is chewed by the dentary apparatus. This apparatus is what you hear in a dried sand dollar.

How do they mate?

The males and females release sperm and eggs into the water. If fertilized the bilateral (shaped like two halves) larvae are free floating plankton until they metamorphisize into the radially symmetrical (round) adult.



People Interactions

Humans use the testes for jewelry and decorations.

EstuaryLive

www.EstuaryLive.org

North Carolina National Estuarine Research Reserve

www.ncnerr.org or tel. 252.728.2170

Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Program

<http://www.apnep.org/> or tel. 252.946.6481

Carolina Estuarine Reserve Foundation

www.cerf.us



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