

Ochre Sea Star



"Although it seems that I'm all arms, some other organs give me charm. I have a mouth with which to feed, a tiny stomach is all I need. And though, it's true, I have no brain, I'm still a star - I can't complain!"

Starfish

by Douglas Florian

Scientific name: *Pisaster ochraceus*; *ochraceus*: comes from the Greek word *ochros* - meaning pale yellow

Other Names: Purple Star, Common Sea Star

Phylogeny: Echinoderm → Class: Asteroidea → Order: Forcipulatida → Family Asteroidea

Size: 6- 14 inches across.

Description: Three color phases are seen: purple, brown and orange. *P. ochraceus* usually has five stout arms, called rays. Rarely, the ochre sea star has 4-7 arms.

Habitat: Found in the mid to low intertidal zones along exposed and protected rocky shores.

Diet: The ochre star feeds on mussels, abalones, chitons, barnacles, snails and urchins.

Range: Prince William Sound Alaska to Baja California.

Life Span: These sea stars are known to live up to 20 or more years.

Conservation Status: Pollution, un-monitored collection, and careless steps of tidepool enthusiasts can put any intertidal animal at risk. So please watch, learn, and touch with care - but don't try to remove these animals off the rocks!

Fun Facts:

- ☆ Like many sea stars, the ochre can re-grow a lost arm, which often takes upwards of a year.
- ☆ *Pisaster ochraceus* is considered a 'keystone' predator. A keystone predator is an organism that has a greater affect on the community than their abundance would suggest.
- ☆ To eat its prey, the ochre sea star uses suckers on its tube feet to pull apart the shells of mussels and hold onto moving prey. It then pushes its stomach out and into the prey, digesting it *outside* of its body! This is a process that can take up to two or three days to complete.
- ☆ Specialized tube feet with pinchers at the end, called pedicellariae, are used to keep other animals from settling on the top side - called the 'aboral' surface - of the sea star.