

# A seashore guide to

## Neath Port Talbot



*An illustrated splash-proof guide to investigating  
the plants and animals found on our beaches*



Neath Port Talbot  
Castell-nedd Port Talbot  
County Borough Council Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol

# INTRODUCTION

The County Borough of Neath Port Talbot includes 14 kms of coastline stretching from Margam Sands in the west to Crymlyn Burrows in the east (see map on the back page). Margam Sands are bounded to the north west by the southern edge of Port Talbot harbour and lead into Kenfig Sands to the south east (Bridgend County Borough Council). Aberavon Beach extends for 3 miles from the mouth of the River Afan to Witford Point and spit at the River Neath. Beyond this is Crymlyn Burrows and the boundary with the City and County of Swansea. At Margam, Aberavon and Crymlyn, small sections of a once extensive sand dune system can be seen, bordering the beaches.

We are very lucky to have a hectare of honeycomb worm reefs (*Sabellaria alveolata*). This habitat is nationally important and is included in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) as requiring conservation action. Areas of mudflats are also a very important BAP habitat on a national level and there are over 31 hectares in the Borough. We have two species on our shores which are only found in southern/south-western Britain. These are the Volcano barnacle *Balanus perforatus* and the South-claw hermit crab *Diogenes pugilator*. Many other seashore habitats exist in the borough, including extensive sandy shores, rock pools, crevices, overhangs, bare rock and man-made structures e.g. breakwaters and piers. These habitats provide a home for many plants and animals and are best investigated at low tide.

This guide illustrates the more commonly found seashore plants and animals in our borough. It is designed to be a helpful aid to inspire further investigation of the local area and to open your eyes to the diversity of marine wildlife which can be found close to home. At first glance, sandy beaches appear barren. However, the guide illustrates the many animals that you can find living in and on the sand and in many other habitats, if you look closely.



# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This seashore pack concentrates on plants and animals found on the seashores of Neath Port Talbot and exposed between the tides in the intertidal area. Each habitat is colour coded for easy use. Only the most commonly found plants and animals have been included. The photographs are an aid to identification. When searching, look closely and think small. Follow the tide as it goes out, have fun and follow the seashore code below.

## **The Seashore Code:**

Place overturned boulders, rocks and seaweed back where you found them and the right way up

- Handle creatures with care and respect and always place them back where you found them as they may be guarding eggs
- Be careful not to trample any creatures or sensitive habitats – tread lightly
- Avoid using a net as this can damage delicate creatures
- Only place one animal at a time in a bucket or tray to observe it more closely and always put them back where you found them
- Do not kick or prise limpets off the rocks as this may kill them
- If you take shells home, make sure they are empty, as they may still contain live sea snails or hermit crabs
- When bait-digging in sand or mud, always back-fill holes
- Take all your litter home and dispose of it correctly
- Finally, for your own safety, check the tide times, wear suitable clothing and footwear and beware of slippery seaweed and sharp barnacles on the rocks!

**Happy seashore discovery!**  
**Don't forget to record what you find.**



# SAND

Wide expanses of sandy shores such as Aberavon and Margam Sands are very rich in animal life. These creatures spend much time buried in sand. They may use the sand for protection, feed in the sand, or on the surface. They have to have access to the surface to breathe and may leave a telltale hole or cast where they burrow. Look out for these and you may find the animal below.



Disc up to 10 mm diameter

The **Brittlestar** (*Ophiura albida*) burrows in muddy sand. It has 5 long slender arms.



Up to 200 mm across

The **Sandstar** (*Astropecten irregularis*) has 5 arms fringed with spines. It feeds on worms and crabs.



Shell up to 40 mm long

The **Striped venus clam** (*Chamelea gallina*) has 3 brownish rays on its rough shell.



Shell up to 50 mm long

The **Rayed trough shell** (*Mactra stultorum*) uses its foot to burrow in sand. The shell is smooth.



Up to 110 mm across

The large **Common whelk** (*Buccinum undatum*) feeds on tube worms and shellfish in muddy sand.



Shell up to 30 mm high

The **Necklace shell** (*Polinices catenus*) feeds on other shellfish by drilling into their shells with its tongue.

# SAND



The **Lugworm** (*Arenicola diversicolor*) lives in a u-shaped burrow in the sand. It forms these casts on the surface and lives below.



The **Sand-mason worm** (*Lanice conchilega*) lives in a tough tube made of sand grains which pokes out of the sand.



Up to 60 mm across shell

The **Shore crab** (*Carcinus maenas*) may be brown or dark green. Its shell has five 'teeth' either side of the eyes.



The **South-claw hermit crab** (*Diogenes pugilator*) has a bigger left claw than the right.



Shell up to 150 mm long

The **Razor shell** (*Ensis* sp.) has a long shell. It has 2 siphons for feeding and breathing and a muscular foot for digging in the sand or mud.



Shell up to 25 mm long

The small white **Furrow shell** (*Abra nitida*) uses a siphon to feed. It lives in muddy sand, buried to about 70 mm.

# ROCKPOOLS

Rock pools are difficult places to live. Conditions here vary greatly between high and low tide. Some animals shelter in them when the tide is out and others become trapped there. Rock pools are windows into the underwater world.



Shell up to 250 mm across

The **Edible crab** (*Carcinus maenas*) has a 'pie-crust' edge to its shell. It can live for over 20 years.



**Hermit crabs** often live in old common whelk shells. They change shells when the old one gets too small.



Up to 40 mm across

The **Beadlet anemone** (*Actinia equina*) has up to 200 tentacles armed with stinging cells. It uses these to catch its prey.



Up to 120 mm long

The **Grey sea slug** (*Aeolidia papillosa*) feeds on beadlet anemones. It has two pairs of tentacles on its head.



Colony up to 350 mm high

The **Hydroid** or sea fir (*Obelia longissima*) looks like a plant but is a colony of animals.

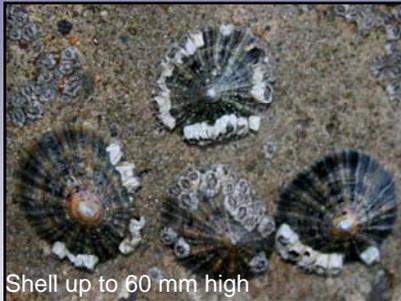


Shell up to 30 mm high

The **Edible periwinkle** (*Littorina littorea*) is a sea snail. It closes its shell with an 'operculum'.

# ROCKS

Many types of animals are found attached to rocks, or they shelter under them. Try looking under overhangs and in crevices, you never know what you may find.



Shell up to 60 mm high

The **Common limpet** (*Patella vulgata*) uses its muscular foot to attach to rocks. It eats seaweeds.



Reef up to 2 m across

The reef-building **Honeycomb worm** (*Sabellaria alveolata*) lives inside a tube that it makes from grains of sand or shell fragments.



The orange **Sponge** (*Hymeniacidon perleve*) is a group of simple animals.



Shell up to 100 mm long

The **Common mussel** (*Mytilus edulis*) attaches to rocks by a very strong 'byssus' thread.



Volcano up to 30 mm diameter

Small **Acorn barnacles** cover bare rocks. The large purple, cone-shaped barnacle in the centre is the **Volcano barnacle** (*Balanus perforatus*).



Shell up to 30 mm high

**Dog whelks** (*Nucella lapillus*) lay yellowish egg capsules. They feed on barnacles and mussels by drilling into their shells with their tongue.

# PLANTS

Plants found on the seashore are called seaweeds or marine algae. They can be seen growing on rocks and in rock pools. Seaweeds can be green, brown or red in colour.



**Channelled wrack** (*Pelvetia canaliculata*) is only found on the top of the shore. It is a small, bushy plant.



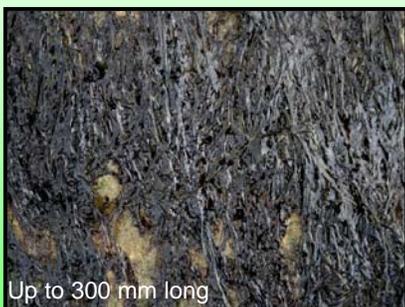
**Gutweed** (*Ulva intestinalis*) can grow in fresh and salt water. It is bright green and crinkled.



**Bladder wrack** (*Fucus vesiculosus*) has air bladders which act as floats.



**Toothed or serrated wrack** (*Fucus serratus*) has a jagged edge.



**Purple laver** (*Porphyra purpurea*) forms thin, long, narrow sheets and is boiled up to make the Welsh delicacy laver bread,



**Irish moss or carageen** (*Chondrus crispus*) is used to thicken ice cream.

# STRANDLINE

The strandline is the area at the top of the shore where natural and man-made objects are washed up by the tide, especially after storms.



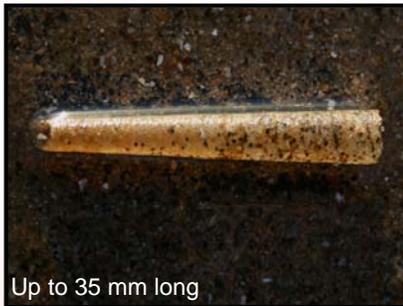
Up to 90 mm long

The **Sea potato** (*Echinocardium cordatum*) lives deep down in the sand. Its fragile skeleton is often washed up.



Up to 40 mm diameter

This is the empty shell of the **Green shore urchin** (*Psammechinus miliaris*). When alive, it lives under rocks and is covered in short sharp spines.



Up to 35 mm long

The **Tube worm** (*Pectinaria koreni*) lives in a tube it makes from sand grains. Empty tubes are often found.



Approx. 60 mm long

The empty egg-case of the **Lesser spotted cat shark** (*Scyliorhinus caniculus*) is also called a 'mermaid's purse'.



Up to 65 mm across

The empty shell of the **White piddock** (*Barnea candida*) can be found. It usually burrows in peat or soft rocks.



Up to 200 mm diameter

Dead, dried **Sandstars** are often found on the strandline after storms.

# FURTHER INFORMATION

**Neath Port Talbot Biodiversity Unit:** The Biodiversity Unit's function is to address the pressures on biodiversity within Neath Port Talbot. Working closely with other departments, outside organisations and volunteers, positive changes have been made. The Unit provides the secretariat for the Neath Port Talbot Biodiversity Forum and its charitable arm, Biodiversity Action. The Biodiversity Forum, with support from the Biodiversity Unit, produced the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP).

The plan is available to download from: [www.npt.gov.uk/biodiversity](http://www.npt.gov.uk/biodiversity)

For more information, contact the Biodiversity team at:

Biodiversity Unit

Neath Port Talbot CBC

The Quays

Brunel Way

Baglan Energy Park

Neath

SA11 2GG

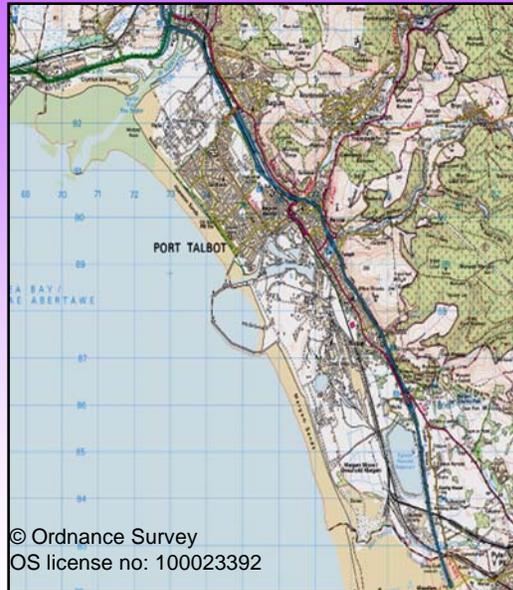
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To report your seashore sightings - contact Marine Life Information Network (*MarLIN*) on 01752 63336 or see [www.marlin.ac.uk](http://www.marlin.ac.uk)

•To report a live stranding of dolphins, porpoises, whales or marine turtles - contact the RSPCA on 08705 555999

•To report a dead stranding of dolphins, porpoises, whales or marine turtles - contact Marine Environmental Monitoring on 01348 875000 or see [www.strandings.com](http://www.strandings.com)

•For information on marine issues and how you can help - contact The Marine Conservation Society on 01989 566017 or see [www.mcsuk.org](http://www.mcsuk.org)

•For general information on wildlife contact The Countryside Council for Wales on 01792 634960 or see [www.ccw.gov.uk](http://www.ccw.gov.uk). Or

•The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales on 01656 724100 or see [www.welshwildlife.org](http://www.welshwildlife.org)