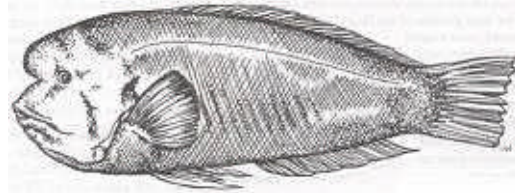


Lord Howe Island

Marine Life



Doubleheader - Coris Bulbifrons

The marine environment at Lord Howe Island was a significant factor for World Heritage Listing in 1982. The Island has an unusual mix of temperate and tropical marine species, including the worlds most southerly coral reef, in the near pristine condition of the Island waters.

During winter, cool temperate ocean currents surround Lord Howe Island and the larvae of many organisms from cool southern parts of Australia are transported to the Island. During summer, the warm East Australian Current sweeps down from the Great Barrier Reef, bringing larvae of tropical marine creatures to the Island. Some of these larvae settle down and contribute to the rich marine community of the Island waters.

Some important groups of marine animals are:

Corals - these are among the most conspicuous tropical animals in the Island waters. Most corals secrete calcium carbonate to form a hard skeleton. In places they form large outcrops and reefs which are ecologically important because their structure provides food and shelter for a wide variety of other organisms.

Fish - over 500 fish species have been recorded at Lord Howe Island. Tropical forms dominate, with many species of colourful Angelfish, Butterfly fish and Wrasses found in the shallow waters in and around the coral reefs. Temperate fish species include the Kingfish, Trevally, Salmon, Bluefish and Tuna. One species unique to these waters and often seen when snorkelling is the Doubleheader Wrasse - a blue-grey fish, growing to 80cm, with a prominent bump on the head. Small reef sharks are occasionally seen at Ned's Beach on dusk, and in the Lagoon at night.

Starfish - the most common starfish at Lord Howe Island is the Seven-armed Starfish - its 7 arms, each up to 10 cm long are covered in short spines. Other starfish include a colourful orange species and a blue species, both with 5 smooth arms up to 10 cm long. Crown-of-thorns Starfish are found in deeper waters around the Island, but not in plague proportions.



Seven-armed starfish



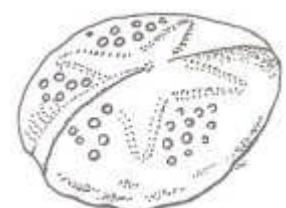
Sea Urchin

Sea Urchins - these spiky relatives of starfish usually have a round body with many medium to long spines which the animal uses for protection and locomotion.

Heart Urchin

MARINE LIFE

Several species are found in the rock pools, the most common being the Red-tipped Urchin. One species to beware of and not to handle is the Needle-spined Urchin which has very long black spines that are poisonous. On the lagoon beaches you may come across the dead skeleton of the Heart Urchin - a flattened, heart shaped shell to 17cm



long with a star shaped pattern on top; these urchins live burrowing in the sandy floor of the Lagoon and when dead their skeletons wash up on the beaches.

Sea cucumbers - large slug-like animals that live on the bottom of sandy pools - the most common at Lord Howe Island is a black species that grows to 40 cm. long; other smaller species are coloured orange or brown. They live by swallowing sand and dissolving any organic matter for food.



Turban shell Turbo cepoides

Marine snails - most of these secrete hard calcium carbonate shells for protection, and can be found in a variety of habitats from the deep water to cliffs exposed even at high tide. Some have colourful shells, such as the cowries or cone shells. One snail species unique to Lord Howe Island is the Turban shell, *Turbo cepoides*, which can be green or orange, growing to 8 cm in diameter, and has a disc-like stopper on its foot to seal the shell opening.

Marine slugs - the most common at Lord Howe Island is the Sea Hare - a mottled brown and green, soft bodied creature growing to 20cm long. It lives mainly in shallow water and rockpools and derives its name from, the two ear-like projections on its head. Other sea slugs are usually smaller and camouflaged. One group of slugs known as Nudibranchs are very colourful, and come in an amazing variety of shapes and colours. The most common of these is the 25cm long, red Spanish Dancer.

Bivalves - so called because they have two similar shaped shells, that are hinged at the back so that the animals can open and close them. The two most common species at Lord Howe live in the sand of the lagoon and their dead shells are often found washed up on lagoon beaches. They are the Strawberry Cockle - having white, deeply ribbed shells with red flecks; and Payten's Codakia, which have smooth white shells with yellow and red markings inside. Small clams found attached to the rock, particularly at South Reef are also bivalves.

Crabs - many species of crabs inhabit the coral and rocky reefs of Lord Howe Island - the most conspicuous on the rocky seashore being a large species with yellow and purple markings, known as the Swift-footed Rock Crab. On the beaches you may see small holes up to 6cm in diameter, these are burrows of the Ghost Crabs, which come out at night to forage for debris. Hermit Crabs inhabit many of the dead shells, and you often see their tiny legs carrying large shells across the floor of rock pools.

There are many ways to enjoy the marine life at Lord Howe Island - Reef walking at low tide is rewarding as many different creatures can be seen. Ned's Beach is the most accessible area; South and North Reefs are also worth a visit.

Snorkelling - Lord Howe Island has some of the most accessible coral reef snorkelling in Australia. In just a metre of water off Ned's Beach you can snorkel amongst coral and tropical fish. Other locations include Sylph's Hole and North Bay. Occasionally, small reef sharks are seen at snorkelling locations. SCUBA facilities are also available.

Glass Bottom boats - several boats take regular excursions into the lagoon to the reef edge for coral viewing and snorkelling. SCUBA facilities are available.

All of the waters immediately surrounding Lord Howe Island are part of the World Heritage Listing and currently some of areas are in the process of being declared a Marine Protected Area. Please care for the marine environment and tread carefully. Always turn rocks back as you found them.