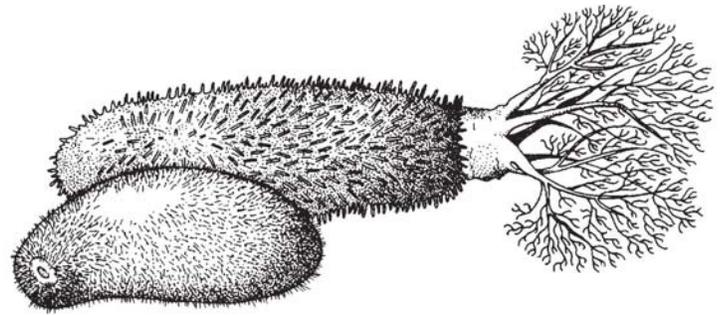


This Month

Sea Cucumber

Colloquial Nicknames:
Hairy Sea Cucumber
Common Sea Cucumber

Scientific names:
Sclerodactyla briareus
Thyone briarus



Field Markings: Black, brown or purple. Body is covered with tiny tube feet.

Size: about 4 inches long and 2 inches wide

Habitat: Shallow muddy waters

Seasonal Appearance: Year-round

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES AND BEHAVIORS

Sea cucumbers are cylinder-shaped, nocturnal, brainless echinoderms with a muscular, leathery body lined with small tube feet. They have the five-part symmetry, but their millions of microscopic spines are found within their skin. Unlike other echinoderms, they are able to retain body fluid and breathe by pumping water in and out through an internal respiratory tree. Sea cucumbers have a short lifespan of five to ten years.



SeaCucumber - *sclerodactyla briareus*

Sea cucumbers have an unusual way of deterring predators. When threatened, they can expel some of their body fluids to scare away their attacker. If that doesn't work, they eject most of their body organs to confuse the other animal. These organs can later be regenerated.

Sea cucumbers feed mostly on plankton caught by the

branched tentacles in front of their mouths. Their largest predators are crustaceans, fish and people.

There are more than 1,100 species of sea cucumbers throughout the world, with the largest - the Tiger's tail - reaching six and a half feet in length.

The hairy sea cucumber's body is about four inches long and two inches wide, covered with tiny tube feet; the thickest part is in the middle. This invertebrate has ten long tentacles surrounding the mouth, and they can be pulled into its body

when startled. A beachcomber will usually see only these tentacles emerging from a substrate. The sea cucumber's color ranges from black to brown to purple.

The hairy sea cucumber is usually found in shallow muddy waters, where the salinity is slightly high, along the East Coast from Massachusetts to Florida. However, other species of sea cucumbers are found in a variety of habitats from warm waters to deep cold trenches.

RELATIONSHIP TO PEOPLE

Many sea cucumbers ingest mud and sand to absorb organic matter. This type of feeding can act as a natural filter in the benthic community. There is a small commercial industry for sea cucumbers for human consumption.

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