



Hitchhikers on Ocean Plastics

Some sea creatures use floating plastic, or other waste, to travel around the world. Here are some that we have found on UK shores. If you look closely you may see some of these too. Let us know what you find on Twitter via @CardiffCurator.

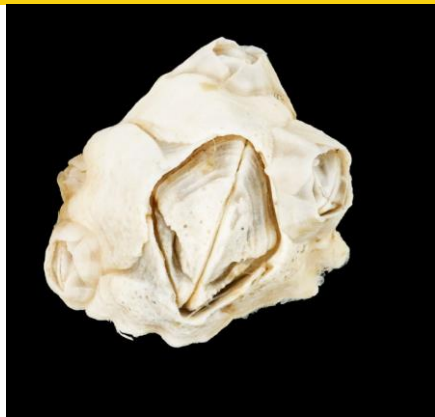
Find more nature guides or get in touch with our museum scientists for help with identification: museum.wales/collections/on-your-doorstep



Columbus Crab
Planes minutus

Only found on floating objects, with no permanent home on shore, this small crab may have been the species reported by Christopher Columbus from floating weed in the Sargasso Sea (northwest Atlantic Ocean). Our museum specimen was discovered amongst goose barnacles on a hard hat that washed up on Ogmor beach!

These crabs are small, no more than 1–2cm wide across the body, variable in colour, with eyes spaced well apart; smooth outer shell (carapace) with 1–2 tooth-like spines on the margin.



Darwin's Barnacle
Austrominius modestus

This barnacle, first described by Charles Darwin in 1854, is native to Australasia. It was introduced to British shores in the 1940s, probably through attachment to ships' hulls and is now common here. It easily spreads around the world by attaching to floating objects.

The hard, outer body has only 4 plates (compared to 6 in most other UK barnacles) and a central region with four plates that can open up to allow the animal to feed. Up to 1cm in diameter.



Isopod
Idotea metallica

Isopods are a group of small crustaceans that includes woodlice. This permanent wanderer has no native home but instead travels the world on floating objects such as plastics or algae and occasionally finds its way to British shores.

Up to 3cm long, grey or brown when alive; complete, curved line across upper body behind the large, obvious eyes (black when alive); almost blunt, straight-sided shape to the rear end.



Goose Barnacles
Lepas anatifera

Often found attached in large numbers to floating objects, such as this hard hat that washed up on a Welsh beach. People once thought that barnacle geese developed from these which is where the name came from.

Distinguished from other goose barnacles by the five, large, white, smooth and rounded plates on the 'head' with only a narrow gap between them. Shelled part (capitulum) can reach 5–7cm in length.



Keelworms
Spirobranchus spp.

Common attached to any hard surface, these worms can easily settle on floating debris that can then transport them around the world. There are 2 native UK species but an American species was found attached to storm debris on the Cornish coast in 2016.

Hard, white curvy tube, 2–3cm long although the worm itself is much smaller, with a distinctive ridge (keel) that runs down the centre.