

## Sea Stars

Sometimes we call Sea Stars “Starfish” but that’s not really accurate as they are not fish. They can’t swim and they don’t use gills to breathe. Sea Stars get oxygen from water that passes over the hundreds of tube feet under their arms. Those tube feet are how they move around, and they also help them eat.

There are some 2,000 species of sea star living in all the world’s salt-water oceans. The five-arm varieties are the most common but species with 10, 20, and even 40 arms exist. The sea star with 40 arms is called a sun star.

Sea Stars have a bony skin covered in spikes and thorns, which protects them from most predators, but they are very sensitive to bacteria. That’s why you should never pick one up. The bacteria on your hands might kill them, or it might infect where they live.

Sea Stars come in an amazing variety of colors. They are primarily variations of purple, orange and brownish-red.

Sea Stars have 5 eyes, one at the tip of each arm. That doesn’t mean they can see well. They can only see the difference between light and dark. Like the octopus, sea stars can regrow limbs, or even their whole body! It takes a long time, though, up to a year. That’s okay. Sea stars can live to be 35 years old.

Also like the octopus, a sea star lays eggs. A female is capable of producing millions of eggs at once. This is important because only small portion of the eggs survive to become adult starfish. Starfish are capable of changing their gender whenever they like during their lifetime.

Most of their vital organs are in their arms. Some require the central body to be intact to regenerate, but a few species can grow an entirely new sea star just from a portion of a severed limb. But sea stars have no brains and no blood.

Most sea stars are pretty small. They are about 5 to 10 inches long and never weigh more than 11 pounds. The sea star likes to eat clams, shells, snails and mussels. It has two stomachs, one of which can be pushed outside the body if needed. This helps them to eat large things because their mouth is so small. This stomach will stay outside of their body until their food is digested enough so they can bring it back in. Like the octopus, the starfish mouth is on the underside of its body.

Who likes to eat sea stars? Typical predators of the sea star are sea otters, rays, sharks, seagulls and different types of fish.