



Marine Life Of Northwest Florida

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The Mexico Beach Artificial
Reef Association

A compilation by Carol Cox
Photos by Carol and Bob Cox

These photos are an attempt to catalogue the diverse marine life that can be found in the Gulf of Mexico in Northwest Florida.

The primary purpose of this catalogue is to help divers identify local fish species when surveying artificial reefs. The Mexico Beach Artificial Reef Association has deployed over 150 artificial reefs and is trying to collect data on the local fish populations. For locations and information on these artificial reefs, please visit www.MBARA.org. This is not a comprehensive or scientific guide, but the work of two avid divers who enjoy photography.

These photos are not intended for use by fishermen to identify their catch. Please refer to the proper Florida publications to ensure you are landing legal fish.

Inputs for this collection will gladly be accepted at fundraising@mbara.org.

All photos, unless otherwise listed, were taken by Carol and Bob Cox and are their property. Please contact us at fundraising@MBARA.org if you wish to use any photos.

Invasive Lionfish

Lionfish have invaded the Atlantic Ocean. It is believed that six Lionfish were accidentally released from a beachside aquarium during Hurricane Andrew in 1992. Others may have been let go by aquarium owners as the fish became too big and began to eat the other fish.

Lionfish have not been reported this far north in the Gulf of Mexico, but we should remain vigilant. The closest reported sighting was in 2006 at Treasure Island, FL, just north of Tampa Bay.

Lionfish are voracious eaters and have no natural predators. They are a serious threat to Florida marine fisheries.

Lionfish are equipped with venomous spines. The venom isn't usually life threatening, but is extremely painful. If wounded, soak the wound in the water as hot as you can stand and seek medical attention.

If you catch a Lionfish while fishing, do not throw it back. Avoiding the venomous spines, put the fish in a safe location such as an ice chest. Cut the line; do not attempt to remove the hook. Note your location and report the fish as soon as possible. Freeze the specimen for validation and research.

If diving, note the location and mark it with an item such as a bright ribbon or pieces of rubble laid out in an arrow. Do not try to collect the Lionfish yourself, but photograph it if you have a camera. They are not aggressive, but will defend themselves if provoked. Lionfish usually remain hidden during the day in crevices or under ledges (i.e. ideal lobster territory). At night, they roam the bottom, vacuuming up unwary fishes.

TO REPORT LIONFISH SIGHTINGS: Call (305) 852-0030. Go to www.reef.org/lionfish for more information on reporting and on this species.



Lionfish consuming a squirrelfish in the Red Sea, Sudan

Photo by Bob Cox

FISHES: COLORFUL & ODD-SHAPED

Elongated



Blenny - Molly Miller (*Scartella cristata*)

Mexico Beach: Wreck of the Vamar (Lumbership)

The Molly Miller has a distinctive orange "mohawk". It is usually found in shallower sites such as the top of the ACMI tower and the Lumber Ship.



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Blenny - Seaweed (*Parablennius marmoratus*)

Mexico Beach: Car Bodies Site

Extremely common. The Seaweed Blenny has blue lines on its face and lips. It can be seen in several different color phases. Often found in empty barnacles.



Blenny - Seaweed (*Parablennius marmoratus*)

Yellow color-phase.

Mexico Beach: Car Bodies Site

The Seaweed Blenny can change color to blend in with its surroundings. In some cases it is yellow.

FISHES: COLORFUL & ODD-SHAPED

Elongated



Blenny - Tessellated (*Hypsoblennius in-venemar*)

Mexico Beach: Shady Lady

Note: This is a non-native species. Photos should be submitted to <http://nas.er.usgs.gov>, the US Geological Survey's Nonindigenous Aquatic Species Survey. So far I've located this blenny on the Air Force Tower and Shady Ledy.



Goby - Spotted (*Coryphopterus punctipectorus*)

Destin

1 to 2 inches long. Has dark spot on pectoral fin.



Goby - Bridled Goby (*Coryphopterus glaucofraenum*)

Mexico Beach: Wreck of the Vamar, alias The Lumbership

Probably common on shallower sites. Sits on the bottom and may dart away if approached. Has bright horizontal line, or bridle, at corner of mouth.

FISHES: COLORFUL & ODD-SHAPED

Elongated



Goby - Tiger (*Gobiosoma macrodon*)

Mexico Beach: Hale's Hole, MB-20

Just over 1" long. Rarely found, may be due to its small size.



Goby - Seminole (*Microgobius carri*)

Mexico Beach: Mixer #6, MB-18

3 or 4 inches. Hovers above the sand and will quickly retreat if approached. Pale yellow stripe on side in front of tail.



Goby - Blue Goby (*Loglossus calliurus*)

Mexico Beach: Sandy Reef

So far I've only noted these at Sandy Reef and the Navy Stage, both about 100 feet deep. Hovers above the bottom near structure.

FISHES: COLORFUL & ODD-SHAPED

Elongated



Lizardfish - Bluestriped Lizardfish
(*Synodus saurus*)

Mexico Beach

Lizardfish are relatively uncommon. Always seen sitting on the bottom.



Wrasse - Slippery Dick (*Halichoeres bivittatus*)

Mexico Beach

Very common. Often darting around over the artificial reefs. Juveniles are 1 or 2 inches long.. Adults are less common than the juveniles. They are around 4 inches long.



Remora - Sharksucker (*Echeneis naucrates*)

Mexico Beach: Car Bodies Site

Fairly common under your boat, or small ones can be seen attached to other fish such as spadefish.

FISHES: COLORFUL & ODD-SHAPED

Oval & Fish-Shaped



Angelfish - Blue Angelfish (*Holacanthus bermudensis*)

Mexico Beach: Car Bodies Site

The adult Blue Angelfish can be distinguished from the Queen Angelfish primarily by the tail. On The Blue, there is a yellow margin on the tail. The adult Queen has a solid yellow tail. The Queen also has a crown with white spots, but this might be difficult to see in bad vis.



Angelfish - Blue Angelfish juvenile (*Holacanthus bermudensis*)

Mexico Beach: Sandy Reef

The juvenile Blue has a solid yellow tail and a crown like the Queen. It is distinguished by pale blue bars up and down on its side. In the Blue, the bars are almost straight; the Queen's are curved towards the tail..



Angelfish - Queen Angelfish (*Holacanthus ciliaris*)

Mexico Beach: Car Bodies Site

The Queen Angelfish has a solid yellow tail as an adult. Not as common as the Blue Angel, but has been seen on some of the reef balls in the Car Bodies site, and also on the Empire Mica.



Angelfish - Queen Angelfish juvenile (*Holacanthus ciliaris*)

The Queen juvenile is similar to the Blue Angelfish juvenile. The main difference is the pale-blue bars that go up and down on the side. They are more curved on the Queen.

FISHES: COLORFUL & ODD-SHAPED

Oval & Fish-Shaped



Angelfish - Townsend Angelfish
(Pomacanthidae)

Mexico Beach: Shady Lady

A hybrid between the Queen and Blue Angelfish. May have markings of both. In this photo, a crown and a tail with a yellow margin.

FISHES: COLORFUL & ODD-SHAPED

Oval & Fish-Shaped



Butterflyfish - Spotfin Butterflyfish
(*Chaetodon ocellatus*)

Mexico Beach: Empire Mica

Black spot on back of dorsal fin. A pair can be observed on many of the artificial reef sites. Butterflyfish are known to mate for life.



Butterflyfish - Reef Butterflyfish
(*Chaetodon sedentarius*)

Mexico Beach: Empire Mica

Black band on tail extends below the tail. Pectoral fins are whiter than the Spotfin Butterflyfish. Reef Butterflyfish are uncommon and rarely seen this far north.



Damsel - Cocoa adult (*Stegastes variabilis*)

Mexico Beach: Car Bodies Site

This has been identified as another color variation of the Cocoa Damsel. In this area it has a fluorescent blue margin on the tail. It is very common and seen at most of our dive sites.



Damsel - Cocoa Damsel juvenile
(*Stegastes variabilis*)

Mexico Beach: Car Bodies Site

The Cocoa Damsel is similar to the Beugregory, especially when young. The black spot on the base of the tail is a distinguishing feature. The Cocoa Damsel loses the eye on its dorsal fin as it ages. Sited frequently on the artificial reefs and may be less than 1/2".

FISHES: COLORFUL & ODD-SHAPED

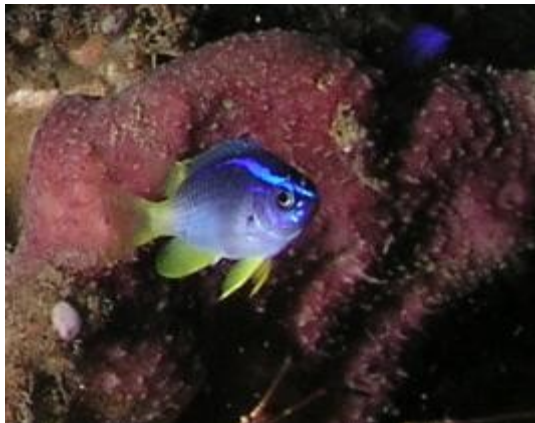
Oval & Fish-Shaped



Chromis - Yellowtail Reeffish adult
(Chromis enchrysurus)

Mexico Beach, Shady Lady shrimpboat

The Yellowtail is distinguished by the florescent blue line that meets in a "V" on its snout. Also by the yellow on the tail and rear of the dorsal and anal fin. Adults are rarely observed, but several are resident on one side of the Shady Lady shrimpboat.



Chromis - Yellowtail Reeffish juvenile
(Chromis enchrysurus)

Mexico Beach

The Yellowtail is usually smaller than other blue and yellow damselfishes in this area. It is distinguished by the florescent blue line that meets in a "V" on its snout. Fairly common, sometimes schooling with other blue and yellow fish. Small and may be overlooked.



Chromis - Purple Reeffish (Chromis scotti)

Pensacola

Tiny to 3 inches. Almost solid purplish-blue, become darker as it matures. It doesn't have the yellow like similar small fishes. Usually in groups, sometimes with other blue and yellow fishes. Fairly common but may be overlooked because of its small size..



Small fishes - Cocoa Damselfish, Purple Reeffish, and Yellowtail Reeffish

Mexico Beach - Shady Lady

Using the photos above, you should be able to distinguish Purple Reeffish, Yellowtail Reeffish, and Cocoa Damselfish all schooling together.

FISHES: COLORFUL & ODD-SHAPED

Oval & Fish-Shaped



Seabass - Belted Sandfish (*Serranus subligarius*)

Mexico Beach: Garfield Wilson Reef

This is a small fish that usually stays close to the reef structure.

Fairly common but may be overlooked because it is hiding in the recesses.



Seabass - Bank Sea Bass (*Centropristis ocyurus*)

Panama City: Red Sea Wreck

Common bottom dwellers. Tail has three points on it. Six or seven dark bars on body and blue spots on face. Has a triton-shaped tail with 3 points.



Seabass - Sand Perch (*Diplectrum formosum*)

Pensacola

5 - 9 inches. Very similar to Bank Sea Bass, but has a fan-shaped tail. .



Soapfish - Whitespotted Soapfish (*Rypticus maculatus*)

Mexico Beach: Air Force Tower Site

Very common.

FISHES: COLORFUL & ODD-SHAPED

Oval & Fish-Shaped



Wrass - Spanish Hogfish (*Bodianus rufus*)

Panama City: Navy Stage

Uncommon



Wrass - Hogfish (*Lachnolaimus maximus*)

Indian Pass: Limestone Ledges

Uncommon. This one is shown in the normal color phase. They may also be red.



Cardinalfish - Twospot Cardinalfish (*Apogon pseudomaculatus*)

Mexico Beach: Hales Hole

Very common. Usually seen hidden at the openings of the reef structure or among the corals and gorgonians.



Razorfish - Pearly Razorfish (*Xyrichtys novacula*)

Mexico Beach: Mixer #6

Uncommon. Seen hovering over sandy areas.

FISHES: COLORFUL & ODD-SHAPED

Odd-Shaped



Puffer - Sharpnose Puffer (*Canthigaster rostrata*)

Mexico Beach: Shady Lady

Seen infrequently



Puffer - Bandtail Puffer (*Sphoeroides spengleri*)

Carrabelle

Rarely seen on our reefs.



Puffer - Striped Burrfish (*Chilomycterus schoepfi*)

Mexico Beach: Air Force Tower site,
MB-112

Uncommon. Distinguished by irregular pattern of stripes.



Puffer - Balloonfish (*Diodon holocanthus*)

Seen infrequently on our reefs, but if you ever fished our local beaches or in the canal you know they are very common.

FISHES: COLORFUL & ODD-SHAPED

Odd-Shaped



Cowfish - Scrawled Cowfish (*Lactophrys quadricornis*): Destin

Rarely seen during the day, but if diving at night you may run across a school sleeping just above the bottom.

Juveniles sometimes seen in St Joe Bay while snorkeling. They are rounder than the adults and the fins are clear, making it look like a blue and yellow bubble floating in the water.



Batfish - Polka-dot Batfish (*Ogcocephalus radiatus*)

Carrabelle

Uncommon.



Sea Robin - Leopard Sea Robin (*Prionotus scitulus*)

Mexico Beach, Mixer #6, MB-18

Uncommon. There are about 18 different kinds of sea robins in the Gulf of Mexico, so they may be difficult to identify without a photo. They often bury in the sand.



Flying Gurnard (*Dactylopterus volitans*)

Destin: Timberholes

Rarely seen. "Wings" may be folded against sides, but will flare them when they feel threatened.

FISHES: COLORFUL & ODD-SHAPED

Odd-Shaped



Toadfish - Leopard Toadfish (*Opsanus pardus*)

Mexico Beach: Car Bodies Site

Very common



Frogfish - Ocellated Frogfish (*Antennarius ocellatus*)

Destin

Difficult to spot. We have seen one in the Car Bodies site inside a reef ball. They can easily grow to 8 inches, looking much bigger underwater.



Filefish - Planehead Filefish (*Monacanthus hispidus*)

Pensacola

1 - 8 inches. Can sometimes be seen hovering just below weed lines, but also on wrecks.

FISHES: COLORFUL & ODD-SHAPED

Odd-Shaped



Spadefish - Atlantic Spadefish
(*Chaetodipterus faver*)

Mexico Beach: Bill Cranston Reef

As common as fleas on a dog.



Ray - Manta (*Manta birostris*)

Mexico Beach: Empire Mica

Uncommon, but you never know where one will turn up.
We've seen one just outside the Mexico Beach canal.



Ray - Southern Stingray (*Dasyatis americana*)

Caribbean

I've seen Southern Stingrays in NW Florida, but never had my camera at the ready.

Uncommon

FISHES: COLORFUL & ODD-SHAPED

Odd-Shaped



Eel - Spotted Moray (*Gymnothorax moringa*)

Indian Pass ledges

Black body with white spots. Black margin on fin.



Eel - Reticulate Moray (*Muraena retifera*)

Mexico Beach - reef balls

Pale, yellowish spots on head, rosettes on body.



Eel - Goldentail Moray (*Gymnothorax milaris*)

Destin

Uncommon. Brown body with yellowish spots.



Eel - possibly Honeycomb Moray (*Gymnothorax saxicola*)

Destin

FISHES: GRUNTS, DRUMS, & BAITFISH



Scad - Round Scad (cigar minnows)
(*Decapterus punctatus*)

Mexico Beach: Car Bodies Site

Extremely common



Menhaden (unidentified)

Mexico Beach: Air Force Tower Site

Seen infrequently, but will probably be in a large school when you do observe them.



Slender Mojarra (*Eucinostomus jonesi*)

Carabelle

4 - 6 inches

FISHES: GRUNTS, DRUMS, & BAITFISH



Grunts - Tomtate (*Haemulon aurolineatum*)

Panama City: Navy Stage

One of the most frequently observed fish on our artificial reefs. Frequently seen in large schools.



Grunts - Tomtate juvenile (*Haemulon aurolineatum*) (2)

Mexico Beach: Car Bodies Site

One of the most frequently observed fish on our artificial reefs.



Grunt - White Grunt (*haemulon plumieri*)

Mexico Beach: Car Bodies Site

Common, but usually swimming solo. Look for blue lines on head.



Grunt - White Grunt (*haemulon plumieri*)

Mexico Beach: Car Bodies Site

Juvenile

FISHES: GRUNTS, DRUMS, & BAITFISH



Drum - Cubbyu (*Equetus umbrosus*)

Mexico Beach: Car Bodies Site

Common



Drum - Cubbyu juvenile (*Equetus umbrosus*)

Mexico Beach: Bill Cranston Reef

Relatively common



Drum - Blackbar juvenile (*Equetus iwamotoi*)

Indian Pass: Limestone Ledges

Uncommon. Adult is similar to Cubbyu adult, but with indistinct black bar from dorsal to pectoral fin.



Drum - Jackknife Fish (*Equetus lanceolatus*)

Indian Pass: Limestone Ledges

Uncommon on our artificial reefs, but common on the ledges.

FISHES: GROUPERS AND SNAPPERS



Grouper - Gag (*Mycteroperca microlepis*)

Mexico Beach: Bill Cranston Reef

Small gags are fairly common, but larger gags are much harder to find these days.



Grouper - Scamp (*Mycteroperca phenax*)

Panama City: Navy Stage

Small scamp are fairly common. Similar to gag but usually have yellowish lower jaw and body pattern continues onto fins. Spots are more distinct.



Grouper - Red (*Epinephelus mono*)

Mexico Beach: Car Bodies Site

Relatively common



Grouper - Goliath (*Epinephelus itajara*)

Mexico Beach: Empire Mica

Goliaths can usually be found on larger sites such as the Air Force Tower or Garfield Wilson reef. Usually solitary.

FISHES: GROUPERS AND SNAPPERS



Grouper - Graysby (*Epinephelus cruentatus*)

Mexico Beach: Shady Lady

Uncommon. Has round tail and several light or dark spots along back. So far, only observed on the Shady Lady.



Grouper - Rock Hind (*Epinephelus adscensionis*)

Mexico Beach: Empire Mica

Rarely seen. Size is relatively small; around 6 inches.



Sea Bass - Black Sea Bass (*Centropristis striata*)

Indian Pass: Limestone Ledges

Fairly common in the ledge area.

FISHES: GROUPERS AND SNAPPERS



Snapper - Red Snapper (*Lutjanus campechanus*)

Mexico Beach: Car Bodies Site

Very common on our artificial reefs. Sit still and they will usually come to you so you can get a better count. They will move away if chased.



Snapper - Red Snapper (*Lutjanus campechanus*)

Mexico Beach: Sandy Reef



Snapper - Gray Snapper (*Lutjanus griseus*)

Mexico Beach: Car Bodies Site

Common wherever there are overhangs.



Snapper - Lane Snapper (*Lutjanus synagris*)

Mexico Beach: Vamar

Uncommon. Can recognize it by the spot and the yellow stripes.

FISHES: GROUPERS AND SNAPPERS



Snapper - Vermillion or Mingo Snapper
(*Rhomboplites aurorubens*)

Mexico Beach: Shady Lady

Common around larger structures such as the Air Force Tower or 18-Mile Bridge.



Snapper - Vermillion or Mingo Snapper
(*Rhomboplites aurorubens*)

Mexico Beach: Air Force Tower

These are small juvenile Mingos. Common around larger structures such as the Air Force Tower or 18-Mile Bridge.



Snapper - Bigeye (*Priacanthus arenatus*)

Mexico Beach: Sandy Reef

8 - 12 inches. Uncommon



Snapper - Short Bigeye

Destin

7 - 10 inches. Usually hover above low bottom structure.

FISHES: JACKS & GAME FISH



Jack - Greater Amberjack (*Seriola dumerili*)

Mexico Beach

Common



Jack - Almaco Jack (*Seriola rivoliana*)

Mexico Beach: Garfield Wilson Reef

Common. Dorsal fin is more sickle-shaped than Greater Amberjack



Jack - Rainbow Runner (*Elagatis bipinnulata*)

Mexico Beach: Empire Mica

Uncommon



Jack - Blue Runner (Hardtail) (*Caranx crysos*)

Mexico Beach: Shady Lady

Usually in large schools.

FISHES: JACKS & GAME FISH



Jack - Lookdown (*Selene vomer*)

Mexico Beach: Vamar

Uncommon, but a few are sited in some on some of the shallower reefs such as the Vamar and Garfield Wilson Reef..



Mackerel - Spanish Mackerel
(*Scomberomorus maculatus*)

Mexico Beach: Vamar

Seen frequently swimming above divers.



Barracuda - Great Barracuda
(*Sphyræna barracuda*)

Mexico Beach: Air Force Tower Site

Common, especially in the evening when they tend to gather above the artificial reefs.



Cobia (*Rachycentron canadum*)

Panama City - Navy Stage

Occasional. May come down to the wreck or check out divers during their safety stop.

FISHES: JACKS & GAME FISH



Jack - Florida Pompano (*Trachinotus carolinus*)

Carrabelle



Mahi (Dolphin) (*Coryphaena hippurus*)

Mexico Beach: Car Bodies Site

Common, usually found around your boat.



Jack - Bar Jack (*Caranx ruber*)

Grand Cayman: Sam's Booty

Bright blue and black border on back by dorsal fin.



Billfish - Atlantic Sailfish (*Xiphias platypterus*)

Mexico Beach: Sandy Reef

Uncommon.

FISHES: JACKS & GAME FISH



Porgy - Sheepshead (*Archosargus probatocephalus*)

Mexico Beach: Hales Hole

Common



Porgy - Saucereye (*Calamus calamus*)

Destin

8 to 14 inches. Blue saucer under eye (look close).



Flounder - Gulf Flounder (*Paralichthys albigutta*)

Mexico Beach: Garfield Wilson Reef

Common



Triggerfish - Gray Triggerfish (*Balistes capriscus*)

Mexico Beach: Garfield Wilson Reef

Very common.

FISHES: JACKS & GAME FISH



Shark - Nurse Shark (*Ginglymostoma cirratum*)

Mexico Beach: Bill Cranston Reef

Fairly common. Like to lay near reef structure.

INVERTIBRATES: MOBILE

Crabs, Lobsters & Shrimps



Crab - Stareye Hermit Crab (*Dardanus venosus*)

Mexico Beach: Car Bodies site

Common



Crab - Giant Hermit Crab (*Petrochirus diogenes*)

Destin

Uncommon. May be out in deeper water.



Crab - Calico Box Crab also known as a Leopard Crab (*Hepatus epheliticus*)

Panama City

Uncommon, they remain hidden under the sand unless searching for food. Divers are more likely to find the empty shells than a live specimen.



Crab - Florida Stone Crab (*Menippe mercenaria*)

Mexico Beach - Vamar

INVERTIBRATES: MOBILE

Crabs, Lobsters & Shrimps



Crab - Sargassum Swimming Crab
(*Portunus sayi*)

Mexico Beach

Common, but hard to spot because they often remain hidden in the recesses.



Crab - Yellowline Arrow Crab
(*Stenorhynchus seticornis*)

Mexico Beach

Very common, but need to look closely due to their small size. Like to hang out by anemones and sponges. Sometimes also find near sea urchins.

INVERTIBRATES: MOBILE

Crabs, Lobsters & Shrimps



Crab - Neck Crab (*Podocheles* unknown)

Panama City

Yes, there is a crab below all those coral polyps. This is a kind of decorator crab that attaches items to itself as a disguise. Uncommon



Crab - unidentified

Panama City

I'm waiting for an ID on this crab. Buries in the sand so difficult to spot.



Crab - Horseshoe Crab (*Limulus polyphemus*)

Mexico Beach: Car Bodies Site

Relatively common, but usually in shallow sites such as St. Joe Bay.



Lobster - Caribbean Spiny Lobster (*Panulirus argus*)

Caribbean: This is another creature I've seen several times in NW Florida, but never when I've had my camera.

These are usually found in deeper water in this area. Not seen by the casual diver.

INVERTIBRATES: MOBILE

Crabs, Lobsters & Shrimps



Lobster - Spanish, Shovelnose, or Bulldozer (*Scyllarides aequinoctialis*)

Carrabelle

Seem to prefer natural reefs and concrete. Stay hidden during the day and come out at night to feed on clams.



Shrimp - Red Night Shrimp (*Rhynchocinetes rigens*)

Panama City

Common, but usually seen only at night.



Shrimp - Scaly-tailed Mantis (*Lysiosquilla scabricauda*)

Mexico Beach: Shady Lady

Common, but rarely observed. Remain in their holes on the sandy bottom and will quickly retreat if they sense an approaching diver.



Shrimp - Sawtooth Arrow Shrimp (*Tozeuma serratum*)

Mexico Beach

Rare. Found on colorful sea whips in water over 75-feet deep

INVERTIBRATES: MOBILE

Soft Bodied & Urchins



Sea Slug - Florida Regal Sea Goddess
(*Hypselodoris edenticulata*)

Carrabelle

Uncommon, but if you find one look around because their may be others in the area. About 1 to 2 inches long.



Sea Slug - Warty dendrodorid
(*Dendrodoris warta*)

Destin

Uncommon.



Sea Slug (*Roboastra Ricei*)

Destin

Very rare. I was fortunate to be one of the first to photograph this nudibranch after Bob found it for me. Good luck spotting one of these, because they are only about 1/2 inch long.



Sea Slug - Ragged Sea Hare (*Bursatella leachii*)

Mexico Beach: St. Joe Bay

These are common in St. Joe Bay. Long strings of them may be seen during mating season.

INVERTIBRATES: MOBILE

Soft Bodied & Urchins



Sea Cucumber (unidentified)

Mexico Beach

Common. It is very hard to distinguish what kind of sea cucumbers are observed without picking it up and looking closely at its features.



Octopus - Common Octopus (*Octopus vulgaris*)

Panama City

Common but usually seen at night. You might see part of one in a hole during the day.

INVERTIBRATES: MOBILE

Soft Bodied & Urchins



Fireworm - Bearded Fireworm
(*Hermodice carunculata*)

Very common. You may see dozens feeding on a fish carcass.



Fireworm - Red-Tipped Fireworm
(*Chloeia viridis*)

Mexico Beach: 18-Mile Bridge

Uncommon. May disappear beneath the sand.

INVERTIBRATES: MOBILE

Soft Bodied & Urchins



Jellyfish - Comb Jellyfish (Ctenophora)

Mexico Beach, Bridge Span site

2 to 4". Very common. Most often seen floating near the surface, but may be found at any recreational dive depth



Jellyfish - Moon Jelly (*Aurelia aurita*)

Very common



Salp

"Salp" is a general name for lots of small critters floating around in the water.

They can be small jellyfish and pelagic anemones, along with hundreds of other soft-bodied creatures.



Pelagic Gastropod

This is one of the objects you see floating in the Gulf. The bright spot is an internal shell.

INVERTIBRATES: MOBILE

Soft Bodied & Urchins



Hydroid - Club Hydromedusa
(*Orchistoma pileus*)

Destin

This looks like a jellyfish, and stings like a jellyfish, but it is really in the hydroid family.

INVERTIBRATES: MOBILE

Soft Bodied & Urchins



Sea Star - Beaded Sea Star
(*Astropecten articulatus*)

Common



Sea Star - Common Comet Star (*Linckia guildingii*)

Uncommon



Sea Star - unidentified

Carrabelle

Uncommon.

INVERTIBRATES: MOBILE

Soft Bodied & Urchins



Brittle Star (unidentified)

Probably common, but remain hidden under rubble.



Basket Star - Giant Basket Star
(*Astrophyton muricatum*)

Destin

Probably common, but remain hidden under structure during the day. Come out at night to filter feed.



Sea Urchin - Rock Boring Urchin
(*Echinometra lucunter*)

Mexico Beach

Very common



Sea Urchin (unidentified)

Fairly common but will wear a disguise of empty shells.

INVERTIBRATES: STATIONARY



Anemone - Pale Anemone

Panama City - Red Sea Tug

Very common. Often found in clusters or colonies. Look in the crevices of the artificial reefs. Will often be accompanied by an Arrow Crab as seen in this photo.



Anemone - Club-tipped Anemone
(*Telmatactis americana*)

Uncommon



Anemone - Tube Anemone (unidentified)

Mexico Beach: Charles House Memorial Reef

Fairly common, but may not be noticed by divers since they are often out on the sand flats away from the reefs.



Anemone - Light Bulb (Actiniaria)

Mexico Beach: Shady Lady

Common. On wrecks on reefs.



INVERTIBRATES: STATIONARY



Zoanthid (unidentified)

Destin: Timberholes

Very uncommon. These were found in deeper water, about 120 feet.



Feather Duster - Fanworm

Mexico Beach - Hales Hole

Fairly common. Will withdraw quickly if disturbed. Some are white.



Tubeworm - Christmas Tree Worm
(*Spirobranchus giganteus*)

Mexico Beach

Uncommon this far north.



Hydroid - Branching Hydroid
(*Sertularella speciosa*)

Destin

Hydroids are very common indifferent forms. Most have a feathery appearance and are often tipped with small, white fronds. They may cause a mild stinging to sensitive areas.

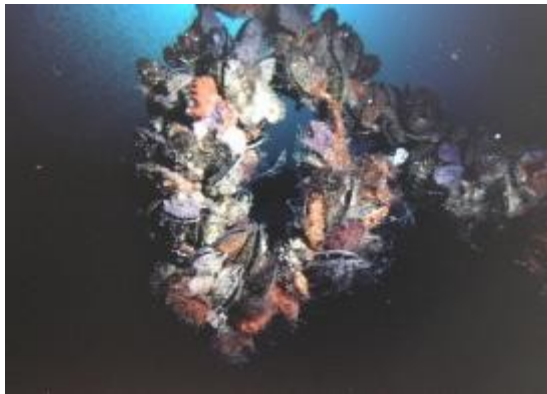
INVERTIBRATES: SHELLS



Oyster - Atlantic Thorny-Oyster
(*Spondylus americanus*)

Mexico Beach: Sandy Reef

Common, but may be covered with growth making it difficult to spot.



Oyster - Lister Purse-oyster (*Isognomon radiatus*)

Mexico Beach: Air Force Tower

Locally common



Oyster (unidentified)

Mexico Beach: MBARA Barge

Common wherever you find these corals.



Oyster (unidentified)

Common, but covered in growth so hard to spot.

INVERTIBRATES: SHELLS



Scallop -Florida Bay Scallop
(*Argopecten irradians*)

Mexico Beach: St. Joe Bay

Common in grass beds.



Penshell- Amber Penshell (*Pinna carnea*)

Mexico Beach: St. Joe Bay

Common in shallow grass bed areas, but have been seen deeper.



Cowry - Atlantic Deer Cowry (*Cypraea cervus*)

Carrabelle

2 - 3 inches. Usually under overhangs during the day. The shiny, brown shell may be entirely covered in the furry-looking mantle, make it blend into the background and difficult to spot.



Cowry - Spotted Cyphoma (*Cyphoma macgintyi*)

Mexico Beach: MBARA Barge

Rarely seen, but if they are observed look around because there may be more. Feed on the red coral whips. Probably cannot over-winter this far north.

INVERTIBRATES: SHELLS



Snail - Atlantic Harry Triton (*Cymatium pileare*)

Mexico Beach

Common, but blends in with its surroundings. This is an empty shell that has been overtaken by a hermit crab.



Snail - Giant Eastern Murex (*Hexaplex fulvescens*)

Mexico Beach

Common and may be seen in large clusters.



Snail - Giant Eastern Murex (*Hexaplex fulvescens*)

Mexico Beach



Snail - Queen Helmet (*Cassis madagascariensis*)

Mexico Beach: Garfield Wilson Reef

Uncommon. Often buried in the sand with only a small portion of the shell showing. Feeds on sea urchins so please let live.

INVERTIBRATES: SHELLS



Snail - True Tulip (*Fasciolaria tulipa*)

Fairly common, especially in shallow sea grass beds but also seen on deeper sites.



Snail- Florida Horse Conch (*Pleuroploca gigantea*)

Mexico Beach

Common, especially in sea grass beds, but also seen on deeper sites.



Snail - Netted Olive (*Oliva reticularis*)

Mexico Beach

Very common but often hidden in the sandy bottom.



Snail - Gulfstream Topsnail (*Calliostoma scalenum*)

Mexico Beach Bridge Span Site

Uncommon. Found in deeper water. These were 100 ft deep, hanging upside down in a pyramid that was on its side. Shells are about 1" across.

INVERTIBRATES: SHELLS



Snail - West Indian *Simnia* (*Cymbovula acicularis*)

Mexico Beach: Car Bodies

1/2" long. Supposed to be common Florida, but rarely seen due to small size and camouflage. Usually on red colorful sea whips where they are very hard to see.

CORALS, SPONGES, AND ALGAE



Coral - Colorful Sea Whip (*Leptogorgia virgulata*)

Mexico Beach

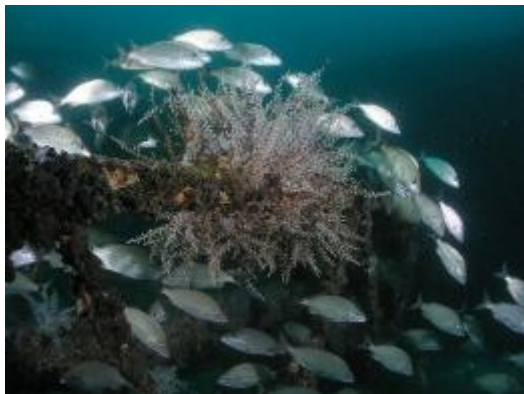
Common



Coral - unidentified gorgonian

Mexico Beach

Common



Coral - White Telesto (*Carijoa riisei*)

Mexico Beach

Fairly common



Coral - White Telesto (*Carijoa riisei*)

Mexico Beach

Fairly common

CORALS, SPONGES, AND ALGAE



Coral - Some type of Lettuce Coral, but I haven't been able to classify it.

Panama City: Red Sea Wreck

Leaf lettuce coral isn't known for surviving this far north, but here it is.



Coral - Ivory Bush Coral (*Octorina vari-cosa*)

Mexico Beach: Car Bodies Site

Common. There are three small clumps in the upper half of this photo. The bright white part is coral that has "bleached" or died. In this area, the coral may die due to the cold water in the winter.



Alga - Possibly Dead Man's Fingers (*Codium isthmociadum*)

Mexico Beach

May be common.

CORALS, SPONGES, AND ALGAE



Sponge - (unidentified)

Mexico Beach: Car Bodies Site

Common. The angelfish seem to love these sponges.



Sponge - (unidentified)

Mexico Beach

Fairly common



Sponge - (unidentified)

Mexico Beach: Garfield Wilson Reef

Fairly common



Sponge - encrusting (unidentified)

Mexico Beach: Car Bodies Site

Very common

AIR BREATHERS



Dolphin

Panama City



Turtle - Loggerhead (Caretta Caretta)

Mexico Beach: Sandy Reef