

**Sponges** are animals that filter the water for food and oxygen. They come in many forms such as barrel, vase, tube, ball, rope, and encrusting and grow from one-half inch to over 6 feet. Many can be found in the park.



Barrel Sponge

**Sea anemones** are members of the same family as jellyfish and corals. Like corals, they have tentacles that are extended at night to feed that are usually hidden during the day. Pink tipped anemone can be found in the park. **Sea Jellies** such as **Portugese Man-of-War** are translucent purple jellyfish, with long, thin tentacles that float on the surface. Beware, they are highly toxic and contact will produce redness, welts and blisters. Avoid any contact, either in the water or on the shore.

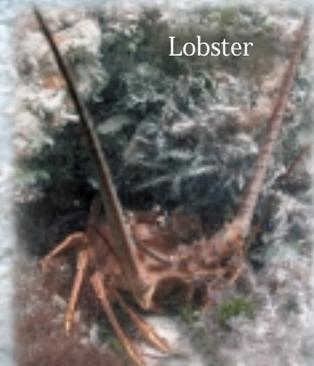
**Seastars**, once called starfish, have a hard internal skeleton and five body sections (although there are exceptions) arranged around a central disc. Broken arms can be regenerated and some species can form a new animal from a severed part. **Sea urchins**



Seastar

are covered with numerous spines that cover a spherical body. Avoid contact as the spines cause a painful wound.

**Shrimp, lobsters, and crabs** are crustaceans, members of the largest animal phylum, and each has five pairs of legs. They all have elaborate exoskeletons, which they shed by molting, to allow them to grow. In the Keys, spiny lobster, slipper lobster, blue crabs, and Florida stone crab are common as are various species of other crabs and shrimp.



Lobster

The Key West Marine Park is made possible by

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The Key West Marine Park is operated by the City of Key West in cooperation with Reef Relief, a grassroots non-profit membership organization dedicated to Preserve and Protect Living Coral Reef Ecosystems. *Be a Sea Fan!* Join Reef Relief for as little as \$30/year. Visit the Reef Relief Environmental Center & Gift Store at the Historic Seaport - foot of William St. in Key West

For information contact:



City of Key West - (305) 294-3721  
525 Angela St., Key West, FL 33040  
or

**REEF RELIEF**<sup>®</sup>

(305) 294-3100

or write to P.O. Box 430, Key West, FL 33041

[www.reefrelief.org](http://www.reefrelief.org)

Photographs from Key West Marine Park by Craig Quirolo, Reef Relief

A publication funded in part by the Florida Department of Community Affairs, Florida Coastal Management Program, pursuant to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Award No. NA 170Z1118. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the State of Florida, NOAA or any of its subagencies. September, 2002.

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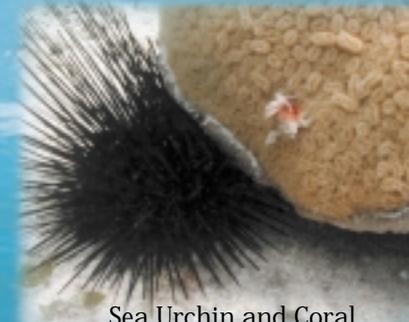
# KEY WEST MARINE PARK



*This public underwater park has been established to enhance protection for the nearshore coral reef ecosystem and to provide for compatible use by boaters, swimmers, and beach visitors*



The Key West Marine Park is part of Florida's coral reef ecosystem and is considered a **hard bottom/soft coral community** with a variety of hard and soft corals, sponges, and seagrasses. These shallow waters provide a nursery ground and breeding area for numerous fish and sealife that later migrate to the offshore coral reefs. Corals are delicate structures composed of tiny slow-growing animals called coral polyps. The Key West Marine Park is home to several **hard corals** such as rose, mustard hill and finger corals that have a hard calcareous exoskeleton and **soft corals**, such as sea fans, sea whips, and sea rods without exoskeletons that sway in the ocean currents and filter the ocean water.



Sea Urchin and Coral

**Seagrasses** are flowering marine plants that are an important part of the coral reef ecosystem. They filter the water by trapping sediments, release oxygen into the water and stabilize the ocean bottom with their roots. Many animals such as turtles, manatees, fish, sea urchins and sea cucumbers depend upon seagrasses for food. Seagrasses are a nursery ground for pink shrimp, lobster, snapper and other sealife. **Conch** is a species of special concern in Florida. This mollusk thrives in seagrasses and the **Queen Conch**, known for its broad lipped shell, is the mascot of the Florida Keys. The **Florida horse conch** was once abundant as well. All members of the mollusk family lack true skeletons although some grow shells, and include snails, sea hares, nudibranchs, squid, octopus, and sea slugs. They are found on the offshore reefs and sometimes in nearshore waters as well.



Queen Conch

# KEY WEST MARINE PARK

The Key West Marine Park is located on the oceanside of the island of Key West, Florida, from Duval Street to the White Street Pier.

The three buoyed areas are for swimming and snorkeling and are closed to motorized vessels. For boaters, there are two access lanes to the shoreline.



**Public Access:** The public can access the Key West Marine Park from four locations: South Beach at the southern end of Duval St., Dog Beach at the end of Vernon Street, the Mary and John Spottswood Waterfront Park at the foot of Seminole Street, and Higgs Beach from Reynolds Street to White Street.

**Swim Zones:** These are areas designed to provide a safe swimming and snorkeling experience without danger from motorized vessels. Stay within these zones for maximum safety. These are excellent areas to learn how to snorkel and become familiar with snorkeling equipment before heading to the offshore reefs. The swim lane off of Higgs Beach is a good snorkeling area, but please avoid standing on the bottom which is home to marine life.

**Motorized Vessel Access Lanes:** There are two areas designated within the park to provide access and egress to the shoreline for all motorized vessels. Stay well within these lanes when approaching or leaving the shoreline of the park.

**These Rules Apply to All Areas of the Park:**

- The Key West Marine Park is a voluntary no take zone; no collecting, removing, injuring, or possessing any dead or living marine life including coral, live rock, fish, tropical fish, invertebrates, plant, conch, coral or live rock. No fishing, netting, or spearfishing of marine life. State law prohibits spear fishing within 200 feet of a public beach. It is illegal to collect Queen Conch.
- *Don't teach your trash to swim!* Please dispose of all trash in receptacles. No discharging or depositing trash or other pollutants into the waters of the park.

- The park boundaries include the underwater cable from the *Western Union* line that once provided communications between Key West and Cuba. Do not move, remove, injure, or possess these or other historical resources within the park; they are for everyone to enjoy!
- Please be a good boater; operating a vessel in a manner which endangers life, limb, marine resources or property is prohibited.
- The demarcation buoys provide navigational aids to identify the swim lanes and motorized vessel access lanes. Do not damage or remove them. Report all missing buoys to Reef Relief (305) 294-3100.

**Prohibited Activities in Swim Zones:**

- Operating a motorized vessel within the boundaries of the swim-only areas. Motorized vessels must stay within the designated access lanes. Do not operate a vessel propelled or powered by an internal combustion engine within any of the no-motor swim zone areas identified and marked by demarcation buoys.
- No anchoring within the swim zones; this area is designated for swimmers and snorkelers.

**Prohibited Activities in Vessel Access Lanes:**

- The access lanes are slow speed/no wake areas. Do not operate a vessel at a speed in excess of slow speed within either of the two designated access lanes
- No overnight mooring or anchoring in the access lanes, which are designed to allow vessels to approach and exit the park.



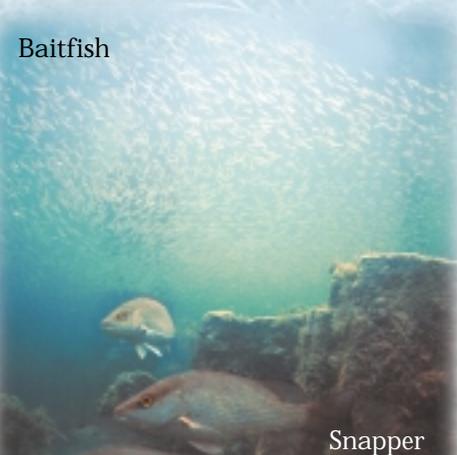
**Fish** The Key West Marine Park is home to many varieties of fish. From the pier at Higgs Beach, a platform of beach rock forms most of the shoreline that shelters mangrove and school master snapper and grunts. Grunts produced an unusual sound and are closely related to snappers but are generally smaller (normally between 12-18 inches). Snappers snap their jaws when hooked. Yellowtail snappers swim in loose schools while others are solitary. At times, large schools of baitfish such as anchovies, silversides and ballyhoo gather in



Grunts

the rocks. To the west, the shoreline changes to a sandy beach where juvenile permit, a small round schooling silver fish, can be found. In deeper water and along the seawalls and jetties are yellow and black striped Sargent Major, three spot damsel fish, porcupine fish, trunkfish, and queen angelfish. Beginning 50 yards from shore, colorful parrotfish, snappers, porgies and multitudes of grunts gather near sponges, sea fans and corals. Elongated needlefish, small barracuda and at times, young tarpon swim through the area as well.

Baitfish



Snapper

**Threats** Corals and seagrasses need clean clear nutrient-free tropical ocean waters to thrive and a great deal of sunlight to grow, so good water quality is essential to their survival. Turbidity, sedimentation and pollution reduce these conditions. Algal blooms caused by excess nutrients stress slow growing corals and seagrasses, reduce oxygen, and inhibit photosynthesis. Poor water quality also promotes coral diseases. The harvest of coral and live rock destroys reefs. Rising sea temperatures cause coral bleaching, stressing corals that

expel their symbiotic algae. Storms and hurricanes wreak extensive damage. Corals are the canaries in the coal mine for our planet's health.

Overharvesting of fish and other sealife upsets the delicate balance of life and maximum sustainable yields for many species have been exceeded. Destructive fishing techniques damage reef habitat. Anchors dropped on reefs, accidental boat groundings, propellor dredging, and diver/ snorkeler impacts from fins, hands, equipment or standing on corals can crush fragile coral polyps. Marine debris, especially plastics and monofilament line, damages corals and is deadly for birds, fish and turtles that become entangled in it or ingest it. Seagrass die-offs affect fish and other sealife that cannot survive in such conditions. Do your part to protect our coral reef ecosystem.