

This month.....

# Northern Rock Barnacle

Colloquial Nickname: Barnacle, Acorn barnacle

Scientific Name: *Semibalanus balanoides*

**Field Markings:** Shell is white to gray, interior is darker

**Size:** 1.5 inches in diameter

**Habitat:** Permanently attached to rocks, pilings or any hard substrate in intertidal and subtidal habitats

**Seasonal Appearance:** Year-round

## Distinguishing Features and Behaviors

Upon first glance, there does not appear to be much more to a barnacle than the outer shell, but they are actually complex organisms that permanently attach their heads to a substrate with a kind of self-produced cement.

Barnacles have flat, irregular tops and resemble little volcanoes. The outer shell of a barnacle consists of white overlapping shelllike plates that grow with the organism. A soft cuticle covers the inside of the shell.

The barnacle closes its shell when the tide goes out and opens it again when the tide comes in.

When the barnacle opens its mouth, feathery legs emerge to gather plankton from the water. These feathery legs are also used as gills to extract oxygen from the water.

The animal grows by shedding its exoskeleton through molting. Molted barnacle exoskeletons can be seen floating on the water's surface.

Barnacles, like crabs and lobsters, are considered crustaceans because their feathery feeding appendages are jointed and they have an exoskeleton. They are the only crustaceans that remain fixed in one spot during their adult phase (as larvae, they are free floating).

Barnacles begin life as larvae in the planktonic column, often aggregating in large clusters when they settle to the bottom. Reproduction is sexual and requires the barnacles to settle in close proximity to one another. Barnacles will often attach themselves to slow-moving organisms, such as horseshoe crabs, lobsters and even whales. They are sensitive to extreme temperature and can die if the tide leaves them high and dry for too long.



## Relationship To People

The barnacle's hard outer shell is very sharp and can cause cuts or scrapes on bare feet and legs. Barnacles are considered a nuisance by boaters, since they often attach themselves to boat bottoms, mooring lines, lobster and fish pots and pilings. The accumulation of barnacles on boats is called fouling and can reduce the speed of a boat and increase fuel consumption by 20% or more.

Antifouling bottom paint is a toxic paint used to prevent the attachment of these organisms. Certain forms of this paint, although effective, can be harmful to other Bay life if not applied and removed properly.

The cement barnacles use to attach themselves to a hard substrate is currently being studied for dental applications.

### HOW TO GET YOUR OWN COPY

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