



EMERALD KEEPERS

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For an Emerald Green, Ocean Blue Coronado

SAND DOLLARS

CORONADO'S BEACHES are home to a trove of natural treasures that are dependent on the health of our local waters. One of the most prized beachcomber finds is the delicate sand dollar, which is most often found in early morning low tides.

SKELETONS

Sand dollars found on the beach are the skeletons of invertebrate creatures that washed ashore with the tides. When alive, sand dollars are purple and covered in flexible bristles—known as spines—that hide their star design. After death, the skeleton is bleached white by the sun and the small spines fade away to reveal the distinctive flower-shaped pattern.

LIVING CREATURES

Sand dollars typically live in shallow waters although they can only survive out of the ocean for a few minutes. In still waters, sand dollars may stand upright with one end buried in the sand. In rough waters, they tend to lie flat or burrow under the sand to hold their ground. Young sand dollars will even swallow heavy grains of sand to prevent being swept away by strong waves.

You can tell a sand dollar's age by its rings that increase with body size. The bigger the sand dollar, the older the age and they can live up to 10 years.

Avoid touching live sand dollars as their tiny spines can be easily damaged. Removing live sand dollars from the beach is illegal in California, so do not pick up any sand dollars that are colored brown or purple.

PREDATORS

Because sand dollars have hard skeletons and very few edible parts, they don't have many predators. Seagulls can be seen dropping sand dollars from the sky in an attempt to break their shells, but they don't provide much of a meal.

RISKS

As with most marine life, the future of sand dollars is threatened by polluted water as well as the rising temperatures and ocean acidification caused by climate change. Large storms that coincide with low tides can leave the creatures exposed to air and harm entire populations.

PRESERVING SAND DOLLARS

If you find a sand dollar on the beach, make sure it is dead before you remove it. Preserve sand dollars by soaking them in freshwater until the water is clear and then air dry them on a towel.

Enjoy the beautiful sand dollars as a reminder of the fragile marine life that needs everyone to help keep Coronado Emerald Green, Ocean Blue.



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Emerald Keepers is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation.

