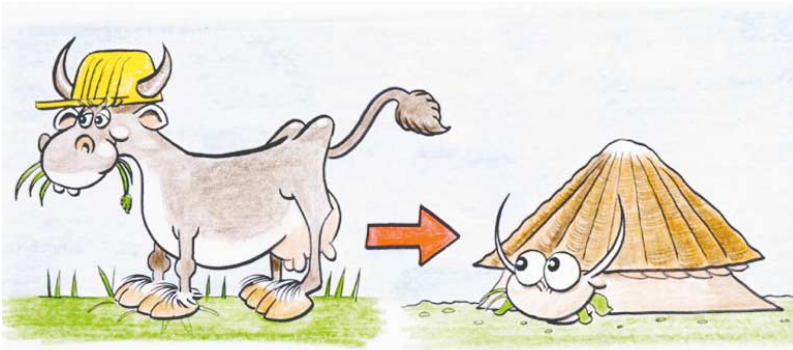


Aquatic Life

The Secret Life of Limpets....

Imagine a tiny cow with a helmet!



If you look on any rocky shore you'll see small cone-shaped shells stuck to the rocks. These are limpets and the best way to imagine them is as a tiny cow with a huge safety helmet and a large muscular foot.

Like cows, limpets eat plants that they scrape off the rocks. But, unlike cows, limpets have to withstand the heat of the sun, attacks by crabs, birds and fish, and the force of tonnes of water crashing down on them as the waves roll in.

Finding their Way Home

Limpets feed at night, moving around their own "territories" on the rocks to feed on seaweed. Sometimes, on a low tide at night, you can actually hear them rasping away at the weed with their file-like tongues.

Limpets will also fight off other limpets they find in their personal "gardens" by bumping them with their shells. But when the tide goes out and the sun and waves attack them, limpets like to be back at their "home" spot, where their shell is perfectly matched to the shape of the rock and forms a perfect seal.

Scientists have now discovered that limpets find their way home by following the trail of slime their foot leaves as they move - which even contains chemicals telling the limpet which way to go.



What's Afoot?

Limpets are members of the snail family and can live to be 20 years old. In that time, their shell becomes perfectly matched to their favourite spot on the rock, forming a watertight seal. So if you knock one off a rock, please put it back in exactly the same place!



The Limpet Family Album

The Common Limpet (*Patella vulgata*) that we find on Irish shores has a number of relatives including the Keyhole Limpet (top right above), which has a single hole in its shell.

The Chiton (top left) has a shell in hinged sections and can roll into a ball like an armadillo to protect itself.

The Abalone (bottom centre) is a very valuable species, not only for the meat on its large foot, but also for the brilliantly coloured shell, which is used to make jewellery.

Abalone are now being farmed in Ireland, which protects the species from overfishing in the wild.

Captain Cockle's Log

Welcome aboard shipmates!

Together, we'll be taking a look at the world's greatest natural

resource - the sea! www.captaincockle.com

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