

GEORGIA AQUARIUM ANIMAL FACT SHEET

Sunflower Sea Star *Pycnopodia helianthoides*

Range/Habitat

- The sunflower sea star is found along the coast of the eastern Pacific from Alaska to Southern California.
- It occurs from the intertidal zone to about 98 feet (30 m) on rocky bottoms and hard substrates, such as dock pilings. Individuals also frequent sandy and gravel substrates.

Physical Characteristics

- The sunflower sea star is the largest sea star, reaching about 39 inches (1 m) in diameter and about 11 lbs. (5 kg).
- Fully grown, it can have up to 24 arms. Young begin life with five arms.
- The sea star's color ranges from purple to red, pink, brown, orange and yellow.

Diet/Feeding

- The sunflower sea star is a voracious predator that feeds on urchins, sand dollars, bivalves, sea cucumbers and snails. It also will scavenge dead fish.
- It is an important predator of sea urchins.
- The young feed primarily on benthic algae.

Conservation Status

- The sunflower sea star is not included in the IUCN Red List.

Additional Information

- The sunflower sea star can move very rapidly – up to 10 feet (3 m) per minute – along the bottom using its 15,000 tube feet.
- This sea star can live up to 8 years.
- The species reproduces between March and July.
- Prey of the sunflower sea star exhibit strong avoidance/escape behavior when encountering it.

Sources

<http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu>

www.nwmarinelife.com

www.seasky.org/reeflife/sea2d.html

www.national-aquarium.co.uk/databases/FAQsLibrary