

A Hidden Forest, Rich with Life

California's Kelp Forests

Do you see brown-green patches of seaweed floating on the ocean not far from shore?

What you see is only the very top of an amazing kelp forest. Root-like holdfasts grip rocks on the ocean floor, allowing these kelp plants to stretch up to 100 feet or more.

Like forests on land, the kelp forests teem with a rich variety of life. Thousands of tiny animals cling to the holdfasts. Schools of fish swim through the tall stalks. Bright colored sea slugs called nudibranchs nibble on the kelp fronds. Sea stars in many hues attach themselves to rocks and kelp plants. Flower-like sea anemones and spiny sea urchins live in the forest shade on the bottom. Harbor seals and California sea lions chase fish. All of these and many other creatures depend on the kelp forest for food and shelter.

Harbor Seal

Sheephead

Sea Lion

Kelp Snail

Nudibranch
(NEW-dee-brank)

Anchovies

Sea Urchin

Sea Star

Sea Anemone

Garibaldi

Rockfish

Sea Cucumber

From the surface, who would guess that such a vibrant and diverse world lies below?

Lingcod

Keeping It Cool

Kelp grows best in cool water. In southern California, kelp forests die back during summer when the water becomes too warm. Scientists are concerned about the ways that global climate change will affect kelp forests and all the organisms they support.

California Spiny Lobster

