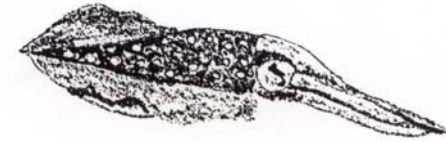


FLORIDA
State Parks
...the Real Florida



www.floridastateparks.org/bahiahonda

Guide to The marine life of Bahia Honda



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Snorkeling

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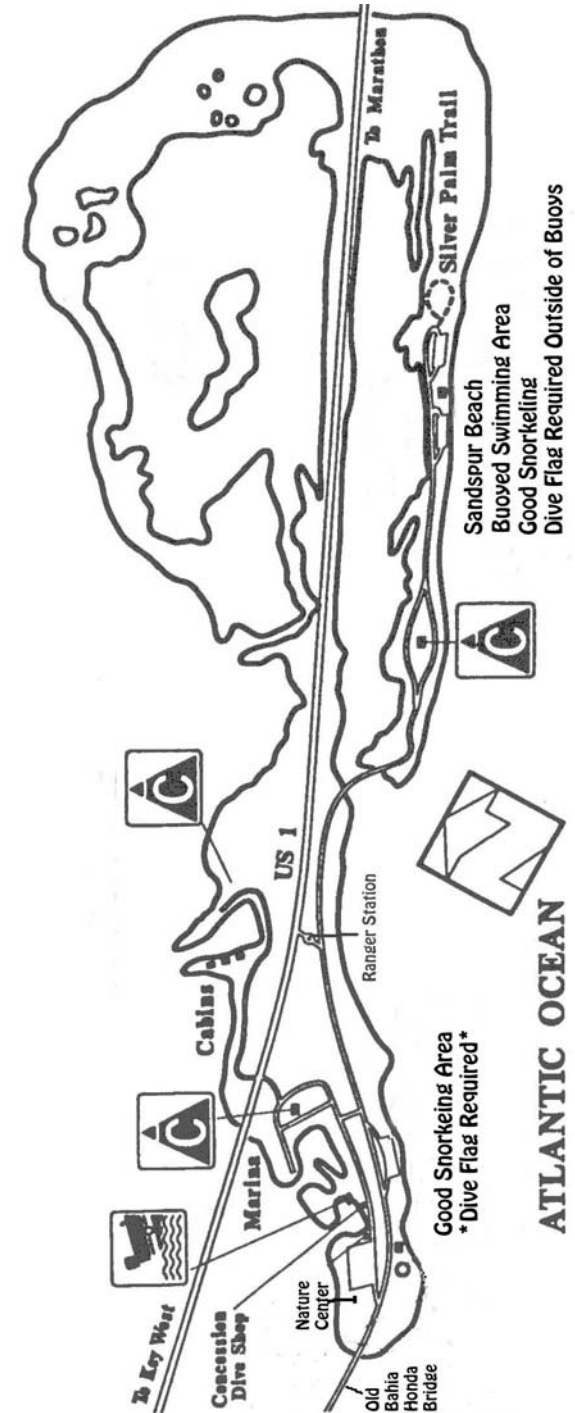
Honda State Park has some interesting areas for snorkeling. SCUBA diving is also permitted but is not recommended because the waters around Bahia Honda are fairly shallow. Soft coral,

sponges and small coral heads can be found just offshore on the Atlantic side of the island. This area also contains rocky holes where tropical fish, spiny lobster and stone crabs can be found.

Before snorkeling or diving, there are a few guidelines you should follow:

- Never snorkel or dive without a Diver Down flag displayed. This flag is required by state law. Its purpose is to make boaters in the area aware that divers or snorkelers are in the water. Diver Down flags and snorkeling equipment can be purchased or rented at the park's dive shop.
- Never touch any marine life while snorkeling or diving. Marine life can be harmed by just a touch. It can also be harmful to you! Stay clear of the yellow stingray, Portuguese man-of-war, fireworm and long-spined sea urchin.
- Often along the shallow rocky bottoms you may see large holes. Never stick your hands down inside these, as they are likely the home of some fairly disagreeable characters. Fish with poisonous barbs such as scorpion fish; morays and octopus with unfriendly bites; or crabs with large pinching claws are likely inhabitants.
- Collection of live shells, marine life and plants is prohibited. Take only photos, leave only bubbles.
- Spiny lobster or stone crab claws can be taken if all laws concerning their harvesting are obeyed.
- Snorkeling and SCUBA diving is prohibited in the following areas:
 - Marinas and associated channels
 - Borrow pit on the bayside in front of the cabins
- Caution should be exercised when snorkeling or diving near the Bahia Honda Channel. The current in this area can be very strong.

GULF OF MEXICO



Queen Conch

Strombus gigas

This very famous pink and tan snail has been over collected because of its beautiful shell and tasty meat. They are protected in Florida so collecting is prohibited. Most of the conch that is served in restaurants is imported from other countries that farm raise it. Conch is served throughout the Keys in soups, fritters, “cracked” and many other delicious ways.



Florida Horse Conch

Pleuroploca gigantea

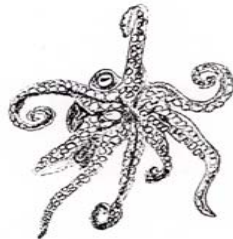
This giant snail (19 inches) is not actually a true conch but related to tulip snails. It is a voracious carnivore that feeds on other snails such as the Queen Conch. The inside of the shell is orange in color. The horse conch is the state shell of Florida.



Briar Octopus

Octopus briareus

Octopods are very curious and intelligent creatures. If left alone they are harmless. Never try to pick one up; it has a beak underneath its body that injects venom. It uses this venom to immobilize its favorite food, crabs. The octopus is related to snails.



Hawksbill turtle

Eretmochelys imbricate

If you are very lucky you may see one of these beautiful sea turtles foraging for food in the hardbottom community. They grow to about 100 pounds and have a hooked beak-like upper jaw.



Seagrass Meadows

Seagrass are true flowering plants, not algae. Three common species found in our waters are the flat-bladed turtle-grass, the round bladed manatee-grass and the narrow-bladed shoal-grass. These underwater plants carry out photosynthesis just as land plants do – this process releases oxygen into the water in the form of visible bubbles. Seagrass benefit the coral reefs by trapping suspended sediments, helping to keep the water clear. They also cycle nutrients and are an important feeding ground for many organisms such as shrimp and small fish.

When you snorkel above the seagrass beds off Bahia Honda, you are floating above the home of hundreds of marine plants and animals. The seagrass beds act as the intermediate habitat between the mangroves and the coral reefs. Some organisms migrate between the mangroves and the coral reefs on a seasonal or daily cycle. Seagrass beds also serve as intermediate habitat for larger species that move out to the reef when they mature.

Hardbottom Communities

Hardbottom communities are found on the Atlantic Ocean side of Bahia Honda inside the reef proper. The hardbottom community consists of Key Largo limestone substrate with little or no sediment. Hardbottom communities are dominated by algal species such as shaving brush algae, oatmeal algae and feather algae. A combination of species of hard and soft corals are also found in the hardbottom community including finger coral, golfball coral, sea blade and sea rod. Coral may be found growing wherever the hard substrate sticks up and gives it a place to anchor. There are also rocky holes that are particularly attractive to stone crabs, spiny lobster and tropical fish.

Unconsolidated Substrate (sandy bottom) Communities

The unconsolidated substrate consists mainly of unvegetated, loose sand. At Bahia Honda, this habitat surrounds most of the island and grades into the seagrass beds. It is an important habitat because a number of burrowing organisms live hidden beneath the sand. Many fish species can be found here too, particularly where it occurs adjacent to the mangroves.

Beaugregory

Pomacentrus leucostictus

This bright blue and yellow fish grows to about 4 inches. It is very territorial carefully guarding its patch of algae, and will nip at you if you get too close.



Sergeant Major

Abudefduf saxatilis

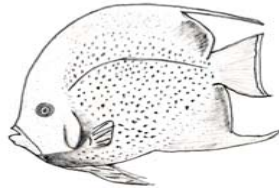
A small fish about 4-6 inches long that has 5 black body bars. It will often approach divers.



Gray Angelfish

Pomacanthus arcuatus

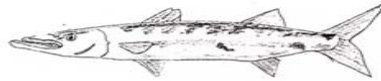
These curious fish are often seen in pairs. They are relatively unafraid and often come close to divers. Size can range from 10-24 inches.



Great Barracuda

Sphyraena barracuda

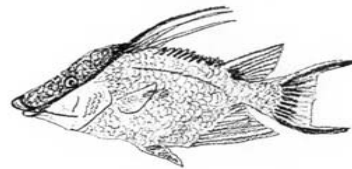
Ultimate predator, commonly up to 4' in length, but may reach 6'. It's often seen cruising around turtle grass beds. It is usually not considered a danger to humans.



Hogfish

Lachnolaimus maximus

Named for its pig-like snout, this fish can change colors to match its surroundings. It can also be identified by its three long dorsal fin spines. They may reach a length of 3 feet.



Highhat

Equetus acuminatus

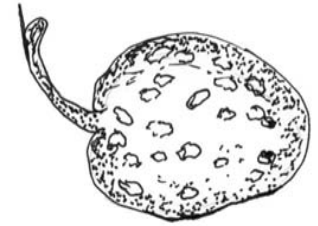
This fish likes to hide under rocks and sponges. It is white with several horizontal black stripes and has an extremely long dorsal fin.



Yellow Stingray

Urolophus jamaicensis

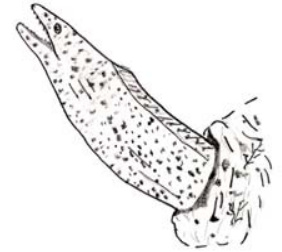
Though small, no wider than about 14", this ray can inflict extreme pain from its spine if stepped on or carelessly handled. It is disc shaped and tan in color with darker mottling.



Spotted Moray

Gymnothorax moringa

These morays reach a maximum length of 4 feet and are usually hiding during the day in holes under coral or in rocks. They extend their head out of their hole and continually open and close their mouth to breathe; this is not a threat.



Seahorse

Hippocampus erectus

This master of disguise lives in the shallow sea grass meadows. Its flexible tail is used to hold onto a blade of marine growth. When passing over sea grass beds you should look carefully or you may not see the many interesting creatures that live there.



Spotted Sea Hare

Aplysia dactylomela

This sea slug has an olive drab body covered with black ring-like spots. It emits a purple cloud of mucus if disturbed. Has an internal shell.



Hawkwing Conch

Strombus raninus

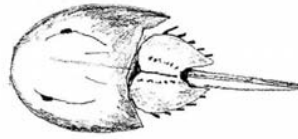
This is a smaller conch (5") and is an herbivore. It is found in the seagrass beds or hardbottom communities. Its shell is very well camouflaged with sediment and plant growth.



Horseshoe Crab

Limulus polyphemus

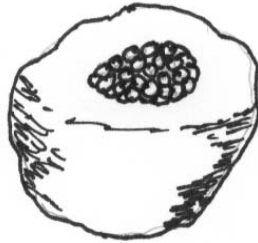
Fossils of these creatures reveal they have been around for over 350 million years and are considered to be “living fossils.” Although called a crab, they are actually related to spiders.



Loggerhead Sponge

Spheciospongia vesparium

This is a cake-shaped, large (up to 40”) gray sponge with a cluster of black holes in the top center. Sponges filter large quantities of water daily and provide homes for a number of small fish and crustaceans. Loggerhead sponges provide critical habitat for juvenile spiny lobster.



Fire Sponge

Tedania ignis

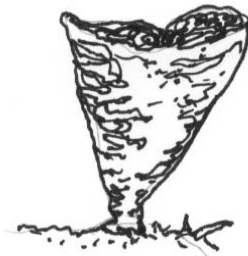
This sponge forms a red crust on walls, rocks and dead corals. It can cause a rash and pain if touched.



Vase Sponge

Ircinia campana

Also known as Robinson Crusoe Hat, this vase-shaped brown sponge is found in turtle grass beds. Many times snapping shrimp live within the vase sponge and can be heard when one gets close to the sponge.



Tubed Sponge

Callyspongia vaginalis

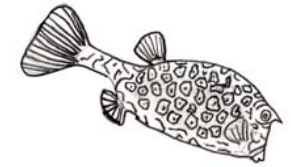
This lavender or gray sponge grows in clusters in shallow water. The outer walls of the tube are rough. Another name for this sponge is Branching Vase Sponge and it is often found washed up on the shore.



Honeycomb Cowfish

Lactophrys polygonia

This strange looking fish grows to about 18 inches. Projecting from just above the eyes are horn-like spines. If stressed it secretes a toxic substance that can kill other fish.



Redfin Needlefish

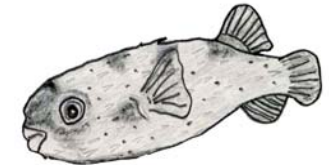
Strongylura notata

Up to 3’, this skinny fish has a long beak studded with many sharp teeth.



Balloonfish *Diodon holocanthus*

This olive colored fish has long spines on its head, small brown spots on its body but no spots on its fins or tail. It can be found resting on the bottom. If it feels threatened it will draw water into its belly and inflate itself three times its normal size. Its strong beak-like mouth allows it to crush, and eat hard shell invertebrates.



Nurse Shark

Ginglymostoma cirratum

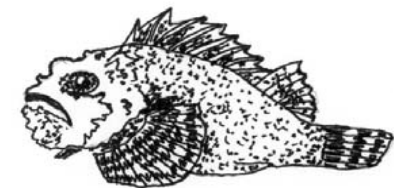
You will often see this shark lying under coral heads or rock ledges. They have two barbells on their upper lip and a small mouth. Because of special adaptations in their gills, they can breathe while staying still, a characteristic that makes people think they are tame.



Spotted Scorpionfish

Scorpaena plumieri

This well camouflaged fish can cause great pain from its spines if touched or stepped on. It likes to hide in rock holes or rests on the bottom ready to ambush it’s prey.



Moon Jelly

Aurelia aurita

Round with a transparent bluish-pink body, their reproductive tissues are arranged in a four-leaf clover pattern. These jellies can cause a mild sting in or out of the water and are often seen washed up on the beach in spring.



Sea Walnut (Comb Jelly)

Mnemiopsis maccadyi

Comb jellyfish are not actually jellyfish and are the most primitive animals to have a digestive tract. This transparent, pear-shaped blob propels itself by moving rows of microscopic cilia called combs. They are about 4 inches in length and iridescent.



Portuguese Man-Of-War

Physalia physalis

A common drift species, it has a bluish-pink float which supports a diverse colony of polyps. Stinging tentacles located on the underside of the float can be up to 30 feet long and inflict a severe sting. See most often when winds are southeasterly. They can still sting when washed ashore.



Bubble Algae

Ventricaria ventricosa

Green plants that look like large glass marbles or small balloons with a reflective coating. These thin-walled algae are composed of one cell – one of the largest cells known. They attach to the substrate by minute hair-like appendages called rhizoids.



Slimy Sea Feather

Pseudopterogorgia americana

Colonies of these can grow to 6 feet, bluish gray in color. Covered in a slimy protective mucous.



Blue Crab

Callinectes sapidus

Found in seagrass meadows and sandy bottom communities. It has a blue-gray body and bright blue claws tipped with red.



Spiny Lobster

Panulirus argus

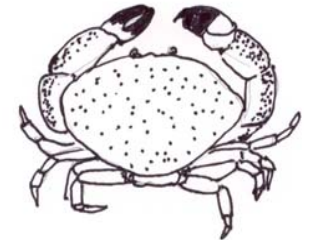
Unlike the Maine lobster, Florida lobsters have no claws, they are protected by sharp spines instead. They vibrate the base of their long antennae to produce an audible warning sound. Hide in rock crevices and come out at night to feed.



Stone Crab

Menippe mercenaria

This is a large, thick shelled crab with black tipped claws, often found hiding in mud or rock holes. It is the favorite eating crab of the Keys and both it and spiny lobsters are caught commercially in traps.



Marine Hermit Crab

(Order *Decapoda*)

Hermit crabs do not produce their own shell. As they grow, they must move into a larger shell. This is one of the reasons we don't encourage visitors to collect sea shells. Some large species of hermit crabs use discarded queen conch shells.

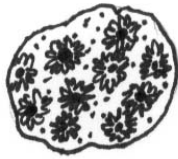


Golfball Coral

Favia fragum

Small coral that may encrust on rocks or form golf ball-sized pebbles. Made up of tiny creatures called polyps that filter nutrients from the water.

Harmed when touched.



Common Rose Coral

Manicina areolata

Pale yellow, pink or green in color. Undulating (rolling) edge is where the polyps live. Usually found in turtle grass beds. *Harmed when touched.*



Thick Finger Coral

Porites porites

Greenish-tan coral forms smooth clumps in sandy, grassy or rocky areas. Branches are enlarged at the ends. *Harmed when touched.*



Encrusting Fire Coral

Millepora alcicornis

This coral forms yellowish-orange branching colonies, often with whiter tips. Painful if touched, can cause welts. This is not a true coral.



Corky Sea Fingers

Briareum asbestinum

This soft coral forms colonies of purple, finger-like rods. When polyps are extended, they appear soft and fuzzy. This is true of all corals.



Sea Rod

Plexaura flexuosa

Finger-like colonies usually oriented in a single plane-overall smooth appearance. Brown to purple in color.



Disk Algae

Halimeda opuntia

This common oatmeal algae forms dense green colonies that cover the bottom in patches. This calcareous algae disintegrates into sand after it dies. All species of calcareous algae contribute to the submerged sediment and washes ashore as beach sand at Bahia Honda.



Merman's Shaving Brush Algae

Penicillus capitatus

Resembles a green colored old-fashioned shaving brush. Common in shallow lagoons or bays with mud, turtle grass or sand bottoms. Grows in beds or individually and is a calcareous algae.



Mermaid Cup Algae

Acetabularia calyculus

Small green algae with parasol-like or cup shaped discs on slender stalks. These one-celled organisms are common in shallow areas and may occur in clusters or solitary.



Feather Algae

Caulerpa sertularioides

Long, erect featherlike blades make this a beautiful algae. These plants prefer shallow, sandy areas or mangrove roots.



Cushion Sea Star

Oreaster reticulatus

Huge sea star, up to 20" across, found on sand bottoms. It moves across the seabed on thick, tubed feet. Adults are orange or pale yellow and juveniles are green.



Brittle Stars

(Class *Ophiuroidea*)

These starfish have long, flexible arms and the ability to hide in any small space. This makes them rather hard to spot. They feed on a wide variety of food, from bacteria to tiny fish.



Sea Cucumber

Holothuria mexicana

This sea cucumber is a large (16"), lumpish, warty creature of the turtle grass beds. It feeds on bottom sediment, digests the nutrients and excretes the leftover sand. If disturbed it will expel its digestive organs and then burrow in the sand to hide until they re-grow.



Pencil Urchin

Eucidaris tribuloides

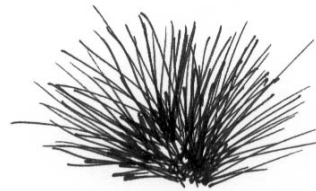
This unique urchin has short, thick, blunt-tipped, relatively sparse spines. The spines may be fuzzy from an algae coating. Usually seen hiding under rocks or in crevices.



Long-spined Urchin

Diadema antillarum

Needle-like black spines are long, 12" or more and are poisonous. It feeds at night on algae and turtle grass. Hides in crevices and is important to the coral reef ecosystem. Don't touch!



Red Rock Urchin

Echinometra lucunter

This common urchin is up to 3" across and has red to black spines. It is found hiding in rock crevices in hardbottom communities.



West Indian Sea Egg

Tripneustes ventricosus

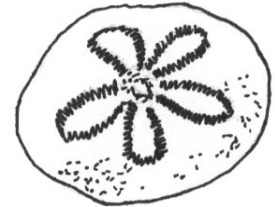
It has short, white spines on a dark test; most common urchin of the turtle grass beds. Spines are not harmful.



Sea Biscuit

Clypeaster rosaceus

This large, thick, short-spined echinoderm looks very much like a puffed-up rounded sand dollar. When living, it is covered with short black bristles. It is hard to see on the bottom since it often covers itself with seagrass, shells and other debris to hide from predators.



Pink Tipped Anemone

Condylactis gigantea

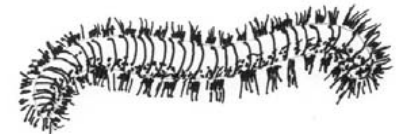
Variable in color, this beautiful creature is often seen with pink or purple-tipped white tentacles set on an orange column. Uses sticky tentacles to capture prey, it can be up to 12" wide. Prefers rocky areas.



Fireworm

Hermodice carunculata

This is a large reddish colored worm, (up to 12") with bushy red and white bristles along the sides of its body. The bristles or (setae) are barbed and harmful when touched.



Spaghetti Worm

Eupolymnia crassicornis

It is common in the seagrass and hardbottom communities where it burrows into the sediment. It then stretches its numerous slender white tentacles out to catch food.

