

Common name
Common Piddock

Scientific name
Pholas dactylus



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- The common piddock has a white elliptical shell up to 12 cm long with curved lines radiating from one side. Empty half shells are sometimes found on the beach. It can live up to 14 years and can be found up to depths of 35 metres underwater.
- Piddocks bore into soft rocks such as chalk but can also be found in wood. When burrowing into soft rock they extend a feeding 'tongue' into the water column to siphon out small food items.
- Their chief predators are shore birds, such as oystercatchers, who feed on them when their burrows are exposed at low tide.
- Reproduction is by spawning annually.
- Piddocks are very common with no evidence of population decline.



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Description

The common piddock is a bivalve mollusc consisting of two shells containing a soft-bodied organism. They are difficult to find alive due to them burrowing into soft rocks but shells of dead piddocks are often found on the beach in two halves. Evidence of their presence can be found as cylindrical holes bored into rocks.

Habitat and shelter

Piddocks make burrows in soft rocks and harder sediments.. They have elliptical shells which are edged with fine rasping teeth used to excavate a hole in the rock. They have a fleshy foot which anchors them onto the rock and helps create a circular drilling action. Once lodged in the rock the piddock never leaves it, As they grow they carve out more room for themselves. Piddocks live below the low tide mark on rocky shores but may be seen on a very low tide in suitable rocks. Chalk rocks with holes and piddock shells are readily found on the shore on the Thanet Coast.

Feeding

Inside its tunnel or burrow the piddock extends a siphon into seawater to filter food such as phytoplankton. A separate siphon empties waste products back into the sea.

Reproduction

Is by external fertilisation, by spawning throughout the summer, producing free-living larvae that eventually settle onto rock substrates as they mature.

Additional information

Even after a piddock has died its burrow can still support life by providing shelter and substrates for other organisms. Increases in levels of biodiversity have been found in areas with piddock burrows.

Fun facts

They are often referred to as the boring piddock or angel wings. If you are lucky enough to find a complete piddock shell with the hinge intact it looks like angel wings. Piddocks are edible and were once a popular food source across Europe, but are now rarely collected for food in the UK as the chalk reef habitat is protected.

They are known to phosphoresce, or 'glow' with a greenish light, in their burrows. Pliny (a Roman writer and naturalist circa 23-79 AD) spoke of luminescence in the mouths of people who ate these shellfish.

References

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