

Sea Star Wasting Monitoring on Cortes Island

Friends of Cortes Island & the Hakai Institute



Hakai
Science on the Coastal Margin

What is sea star wasting?

Sea star wasting syndrome affects the tissues of sea stars and is ultimately fatal. The current outbreak started in 2013, and caused a widespread and unprecedented die-off of sea stars from Alaska to California. It continues to persist at low levels throughout the region. Populations of some species show signs of recovery in some places, while others are still depleted, or even extirpated. Researchers are now exploring big questions about the persistence of sea star wasting and how well populations are recovering throughout British Columbia and beyond.

Which species have been affected?

Over 20 sea star species have been impacted, including key players in the marine food web such as the once-ubiquitous purple sea stars (*Pisaster ochraceus*) and sunflower stars (*Pycnopodia heliathoides*). Visit seastarwasting.org for a list of affected species, and to learn more about the outbreak and the latest science.

What do diseased stars look like?

Diseased sea stars start off with white lesions, which progresses to lost limbs and a melted or dissolved appearance. Examples of these signs in purple sea stars are shown on the following pages. When making a photo observation of a sea star with signs of wasting try to capture these features in your photos, but be sure not to touch the animal!

Spawning stars have orange patches on their body that can be mistaken for early stages of wasting; [click here](#) to see photos of this, and to see photos of sea star wasting at different stages and in different species.



Purple sea star with white lesion. Photo by Alyssa Gehman/Hakai

Purple sea stars with lesions:



Photos by Alyssa Gehman/Hakai

Later stages of wasting, with severe lesions, limb loss, or melting/dissolving appearance:



Photo by Carolyn Prentice/Hakai



Photo by Angeleen Olson/Hakai



Photo by Faye Manning/Hakai



Photo by Kelly Fretwell/Hakai



Photo by Grant Callegari/Hakai

Questions? Want to get further involved? Contact Kelly Fretwell at biodiversity@hakai.org.