

WITH PHIL GATES

The daisy brittlestar *Ophiopholis aculeata* can be found in rock crevices, often among mussels. It's most common in the north.



Mike Telles/istockphoto.com

SEASIDE CELEBRITY

# When you wish upon a star...

**SEARCH UNDER** stones at low tide for brittlestars, the smaller, more fragile cousins of starfish. If you find any, be sure to handle them with great care because their slender arms break off very easily (though they do regrow).

Brittlestars can insinuate themselves into small spaces, thanks to loosely joined calcareous plates under their body surfaces that give their arms great flexibility. When alarmed, they contract their body-wall muscles and pull the plates together, so their

arms become rigid and brittle. Like their cousins, they glide over the seabed with the help of co-ordinated contractions of tube feet with suckers, though they have fewer of these than the larger starfish.

**BBC WILDLIFE SHOP**

**Photographic Guide to the Sea and Shore Life of Britain and NW Europe** by R Gibson et al (OUP, £16.99). Buy on p79, quoting code WLSUM07/19

## PHIL'S TOP 10 ROCKPOOLING BEACHES IN THE UK

- 1 Batten Bay, Mount Batten, Plymouth Sound  
[www.jncc.gov.uk/ProtectedSites/SACselection/sac.asp?EUcode=UK0013111](http://www.jncc.gov.uk/ProtectedSites/SACselection/sac.asp?EUcode=UK0013111)
- 2 Wembury Beach, South Hams, Devon  
[www.familyholidaysouthwest.co.uk/main/en/alt-provider-17676.html](http://www.familyholidaysouthwest.co.uk/main/en/alt-provider-17676.html)
- 3 Tunnels Beach, Ilfracombe, Devon  
[www.tunnelsbeaches.co.uk](http://www.tunnelsbeaches.co.uk)
- 4 West Angle Bay, Milford Haven, Dyfed, Wales  
[www.visitpembrokeshire.com](http://www.visitpembrokeshire.com)
- 5 Llyn Peninsula and Anglesey  
[www.forces-of-nature.co.uk/beachguide/bg\\_llyn.htm](http://www.forces-of-nature.co.uk/beachguide/bg_llyn.htm)
- 6 St Abbs and Eyemouth Voluntary Marine Reserve, Northumberland  
[www.marine-reserve.co.uk/welcome/extent.htm](http://www.marine-reserve.co.uk/welcome/extent.htm)

- 7 Flamborough Head, Yorkshire  
[www.flamboroughuk.net](http://www.flamboroughuk.net)
- 8 St Mary's Island, North Tyneside  
[www.northtyneside.gov.uk/tourist/lighthouse.htm](http://www.northtyneside.gov.uk/tourist/lighthouse.htm)
- 9 Bembridge Ledges, Isle of Wight, Hampshire  
[www.islandbreaks.co.uk/site/places-to-visit/beach-guide/bembridge/](http://www.islandbreaks.co.uk/site/places-to-visit/beach-guide/bembridge/)
- 10 Roome Bay, Crail, Fife  
[www.goodbeachguide.co.uk/details.php?beach=Roome%20Bay.%20Crail](http://www.goodbeachguide.co.uk/details.php?beach=Roome%20Bay.%20Crail)



## SHELL HUNTING

▼ **SUNSET SHELLS** are generally buff, with pinkish lines radiating from the hinge where the two shell halves join. The **FAROE SUNSET SHELL** *Gari fervensis* is one of the most common. It has an attractive purple inner-shell surface and occurs all round our coastline, where it lives partially buried in sand. The prominent ridge across the shell is a key id clue.



▼ **SLIPPER LIMPETS** *Crepidula fornicata*, originally introduced from America but now very common along the English Channel and south-western coastlines, have intriguing sex lives. They aggregate in stacks of up to a dozen individuals, with large females on the bottom, small males on the top and hermaphrodites in between. Young males settling at the top of the chain gradually transform into hermaphrodites and finally become females as they mature.



▼ Britain's diminutive **SPOTTED COWRIE** *Trivia monacha*, which measures just a centimetre in length, is a far cry from the intricately patterned, glossy cowries prized by collectors in the tropics, so it's often overlooked. This cowrie is most common along the Atlantic coast, where it feeds on colonial sea squirts living on the holdfasts of kelp below the low-water mark. Look for its shell on the strandline.

