TAMPA BAY WATCH
Restoring the Bay Every Day

Kids' pages

NEWS FOR THE KIDS OF TAMPA BAY!

Fall 2023 issue

Q Can you find scallops in Tampa Bay?

A Looking for scallops in Tampa Bay is like going on an egg hunt! These animals rely on healthy seagrass habitat, which provides oxygen for marine life and camouflage from predators. Historically, Tampa Bay was known for its robust seagrass beds, but unfortunately lost most of this coverage in the early 1960s when dredging and waste dumping caused the water quality to become very poor and created a hostile environment for marine life. Since then, the water quality and seagrass beds have improved to levels that once again support the bay scallop population, so it is possible to find them in Tampa Bay!

These animals remain very sensitive to changes in water quality, so events such as red tide, high rainfall, and loosening of bottom sediments can decrease populations quickly, with extreme changes resulting in local population collapses. Even further, bay scallops typically only live one year, so local populations are more susceptible to periodic collapses because each year the population must produce enough offspring to replace the previous generation. Because of this, harvesting scallops is restricted to certain counties north of Tampa Bay only during specific weeks of the summer as determined by FWC, who also sets daily limits on how many scallops are able to be harvested per person.

In Tampa Bay, you are still able to search for scallops by snorkeling in shallow waters and looking for the small shells nestled in the seagrass. You might even be lucky enough to see one swimming! Just remember to look at—don't touch or take—these unique creatures in Tampa Bay so that their populations are able to grow.

Snorkeling is a great way to find scallops hiding in seagrass.

Sources: Tampa Bay Watch; Manatee County Water Atlas, Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, University of Florida IFAS Extension, riverventures.com.

MEET THE

Bay Scallop

Argopecten irradians

SIZE: 3 inches across shell

DIET: Bay scallop feeds on algae and organic matter by opening its shells and filtering the water over their gills

DISTRIBUTION: Found along the Atlantic coast of the U.S. from Massachusetts to the east coast of Florida, with small populations on the west coast of Florida

Say hello to the beautiful, blue-eyed bay scallop! The bay scallop is a type of bivalve, or two shelled mollusk, that has a dark, speckled top shell and a mostly white bottom shell. Many bivalve species are slow moving, but not the bay scallop! When startled, the scallop uses its strong muscles to clap its two shells together and swim backwards.

Along its shell lies 30 to 40 bright blue eyes that the bay scallop will use to check out its surroundings and look for predators. Typically inhabiting shallow seagrass beds, the bay scallop will filter feed, taking small particles out of the water for a snack! Unfortunately, too much change in the estuary is bad news for the scallop. They are sensitive to water quality change, seagrass habitat loss, and increases in sediment.

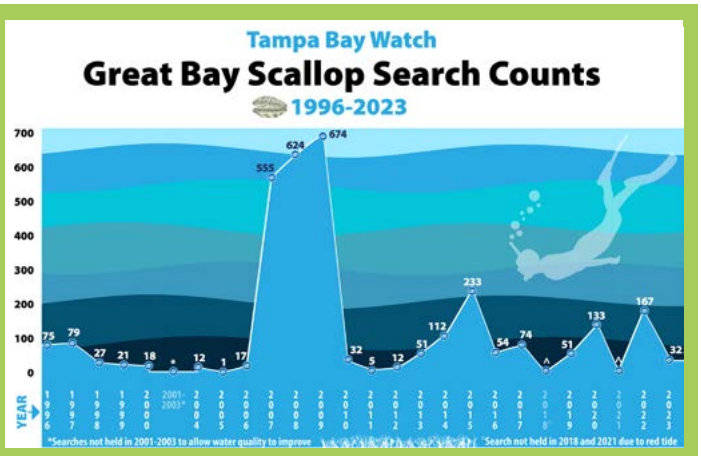
Sources: marinelab.fsu.edu, myfwc.com; Joshua J Wittmer; Orlando Sentinel

Top: A live bay scallop with its shells open showing both its eyes and tentacles; Bottom: A live bay scallop in a Florida seagrass bed.

CONSERVATION CORNER

The Great Bay Scallop Search

Have you ever wanted to look for scallops in the Bay but don't know where to start? Read below for information about one of Tampa Bay Watch's volunteer projects that actually gets you out on the water scallop searching for a good cause!



Historic scallop search count numbers from 1996-2023

Because scallops are so sensitive to water quality changes in their habitat, they are a great indicator species for assessing the health of the estuary! As an indicator species, a scallop's presence in a body of water is a positive sign of ecosystem health. In order to achieve a sustainable scallop population in Tampa Bay, an assessment of the status and trends of the current population must occur. Every summer, Tampa Bay Watch, in partnership with Tampa Bay Estuary Program, organize The Great Bay Scallop Search to accomplish this goal. Volunteers are recruited to snorkel along set transect lines in seagrass beds to search for scallops in select areas of Tampa Bay. The event fills up quickly every year, with over 200 participants helping monitor and document the status of the bay scallop population. So far, the scallop counts have not indicated that populations are strong enough to be harvested in Tampa Bay. However, keeping track of these numbers helps improve the accessibility of information that can be used for data-driven management decisions in the future.

Sources: Tampa Bay Estuary Program, Tampa Bay Watch

Fun Facts

- **Weathervane scallops are the largest species of scallop; their shells can grow to be over ten inches across!**
- **Of the 12 million or so eggs a single scallop releases, only one may survive to adulthood!**
- **Lightning whelks will lay an egg casing that can contain over 10,000 eggs; the first whelk to hatch out of the casing will eat the other eggs that didn't hatch!**
- **Oysters are a filter-feeding bivalve like the scallop; one oyster can filter 50 gallons of water in a single day!**

Sources: centralcoastbiodiversity.org, tpwd.texas.gov, naplesmanateetours.com, Tampa Bay Watch

Sustainability Tip

Sustainable Seafood

When shopping for seafood options, look to the Monterey Bay Aquarium seafood watch to find out which choices are the most sustainable. Their pocket guide for the southeast tells you which options are responsibly caught so you can do your part in protecting marine life!

Source: Seashell Painting

Kids' Pages is a supplement to the *Bay Watch Log*. Please get your kids involved and sign them up to be a member today! Email **membership@tampabaywatch.org** or visit tampabaywatch.org.

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