

## EXPLORING THE BEACHES AND NATURE PARKS IN THE GALVESTON AREA

### BEACH VERTEBRATES

**Fish** – In calm surf, schools of mullet nibble the water for food. A sudden water boil suggests pursuing speckled trout, which in turn, are pursued by wade anglers. In rough surf, wade anglers retreat, replaced by anglers on beachfront piers and rock groins, whose catch includes redfish, whiting, croaker, black drum and sheepshead. Deep-sea anglers catch red snapper, kingfish, Spanish mackerel, ling, amberjack, and tuna.

**Sharks and Rays** – Bull, bonnethead, and blacktip sharks occur in these waters, but don't worry, shark attacks on humans are an extremely rare event. In fact, death by lightning is 30 times more likely than death by shark attack. Stingrays, which also reside in the gulf waters, may pose a greater risk. Stingrays have a spine at the base of their long, whip-like tail, a weapon they use defensively when threatened. To avoid stingray injury when in the water, shuffle your feet to alert the animal of your presence, which gives it the opportunity to move away without feeling threatened.

**Bottlenose Dolphins** – Bottlenose dolphins are the most common marine mammal found in the Gulf of Mexico and along Galveston Island. Our local population of about one thousand animals, may be viewed from the beach-front or the Bolivar ferry. The dolphins are seen at the surface when they come up to breathe through their blowhole. Since dolphins travel in social units (pods) of 2-15, when you see one, you usually see others. Although noted for their play, bottlenose dolphins work to catch 20 pounds of fish per day. To maximize each catch, they often work together to herd fish, such as mullet, into tight bunches.



### BEACH INVERTEBRATES

**Sand Dollars** – Sand dollars use numerous short spines on their round, flattened bodies to move beneath the near-shore sand where they escape waves and gather food. When sand dollars die, their spines wear away as their body washes ashore, leaving the bare, often broken skeletons found on the beach.



**Predatory Snails** – A hole in bivalve shells on the beach is the work of moon snails that live near shore. Moon snails search for bivalves beneath the sand. When a bivalve is located, it is held with the foot while a toothed belt (radula) slowly creates a small circular hole in the shell; the meal is then extracted through the hole.

**Traveling Clams** – Coquina clams appear on the sand near waters edge during periods of tidal change. Waves wash the clams up the beach on a flooding tide, and seaward on an ebbing tide; this movement keeps them in a favorable position to obtain food.

**Stinging Jellyfish** – Cannonball jellyfish are harmless. The Portuguese man-of-war jellyfish are predators that you want to be aware of and can be recognized by their blue, sail-like float. These Portuguese jellyfish are blown shoreward in large numbers. Avoid the tentacles that trail many feet beneath the float, because they can deliver a painful sting, and even ashore, the tentacles remain alive for several days.

**Crabs and Shrimp** – Speckled crabs and blue crabs live in the surf, so you might see or step on one. If you do, don't panic, just stand back and they will move away. Shrimp move from the bays into the Gulf of Mexico to mature into adults. Shrimp boats, sometimes visible on the horizon, catch the adult shrimp and sell them to local seafood markets.