

Abalone

by

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Abalones are marine snails belonging to the genus *haliotis*, family *haliotidae* and are related to clams. Abalone lives outside coastal waters of southeastern Alaska from Dixon Entrance to Icy Straits. It grows up to six inches in length, but it is rarely found longer than 5 ½ inches. The oval shell contains up to six holes and has an exterior of multicolor and sea growth which is similar to the surrounding habitat.

The female when mature is orange, and the male is brown to black. Abalones are herbivores. They prefer eating pieces of kelp, a large brown algae. They may also feed on phytoplankton, if there is nothing else to eat. Abalones have to watch out for greedy sea urchins! The urchins will compete for food and space against the abalone, wary of predators such as octopus, carp, lobsters, seastars, and otters. The female abalone can release up to 3 million eggs! The sexes are separate and can be distinguished in individuals as small as one inch. Black abalones have black and smooth epiderm and tentacles. The shell surface is black or dark with a lacy edge. The tentacles are greenish and slender. The shell is flattened, narrow, and marked with low ribs. There are 5 to 9 pores and they are flush with the shell. Flat abalones have yellowish and brown epiderm with a pebbly surface and lacy edge. The tentacles are greenish and slender. The shell is flattened, narrow, and marked with low ribs. There are 5 to 6 open pores, and the pore edges are moderately elevated above the shell surface. Flat abalones range from British Columbia, Canada to San Diego, California. They are found in the subtidal zone from 20 feet down to at least 70 feet. Flat abalones reach 7 inches in length, but are commonly under 5 inches.

Green abalones have a mottled cream and brown epiderm with tubercles scattered on the surface and a frilly edge. The tentacles are olive green. The shell is usually brown, and its surface marked with many low, flat-topped ribs that run parallel to the pores. There are 5 to 7 open pores. The pore edges are elevated above the shell.