

10-7-56

# Along The Trail

## by ken legg

I hesitated a long time before making this picture public. It shows a starfish eating an abalone.

Our common starfishes (pisaster ochraceus) are so maltreated and despised already by many who go to the shore, and this picture will serve only to increase their hatred. I wonder if maybe the reason some people don't like starfish is because they fear competition.

We cannot eat the starfish, and if we can't eat him he isn't of much use to some humans. They either know, or suspect, that he competes with them for mussels, something which they can eat. If a mussel bed is depleted, the starfish gets the blame—not man. Starfish are objects for scorn when witnessed by a large number of fishermen.

This misunderstanding of the wild animals is only the result of ideas not founded upon truth but also upon hearsay and prejudice. It is very doubtful that the starfish leads a life which contributes nothing to nature. Somewhere in his routine he makes a valuable contribution to something that man finds useful. If we only knew all of his life history we might bring these beneficial things to light.

It has been suspected that starfish may prey upon very small abalones. This one is full grown, and it is a certainty that the predator did not pull it from a rock unless it was an unhealthy specimen. The abalone was probably found by the starfish after it had been dislodged by other means, for I certainly do not believe any starfish is capable of dislodging a mature, healthy abalone.

The animal population at the reserve where this picture was taken is similar to that existing in other areas where man is not interfering. It is akin to a mesa I knew where vast numbers of quail and rabbits lived. There were more coyotes and hawks here than anywhere in the county. Yet, the game population was tremendous. Man did not kill the game species, neither did he interfere with the predators.

Along the strip of ocean shore, now a state marine life reserve,

one can see great numbers of abalones. They literally cover hundreds of square feet of rock surface in many places. But, there is a large starfish population.

Some of these are orange, others purple. Often we were asked why. From what I can learn, they are of the same species and just why this difference in color, is not known.

Certain investigators believe that starfish come upon their food only by chance, but laboratory experiments have indicated that they possess a sensitivity to substances in the water just as animals on land have ability to smell odors.

The common starfish is carnivorous, feeding upon shellfish, clams, mussels, scallops, etc. When a starfish is in a bed of mussels it finds its prey by searching, as living mussels give off no odor detectable by a starfish.

In most starfishes the eggs or sperm are spawned into the water and the fertilized eggs develop into larvae. The larvae go through various stages of development before changing into the adult form. However, several of our west coast species brood their eggs, and may be found humped over the eggs. By arching the body and drawing the arms close together the mother starfish forms a cavity that serves as a brood pouch.

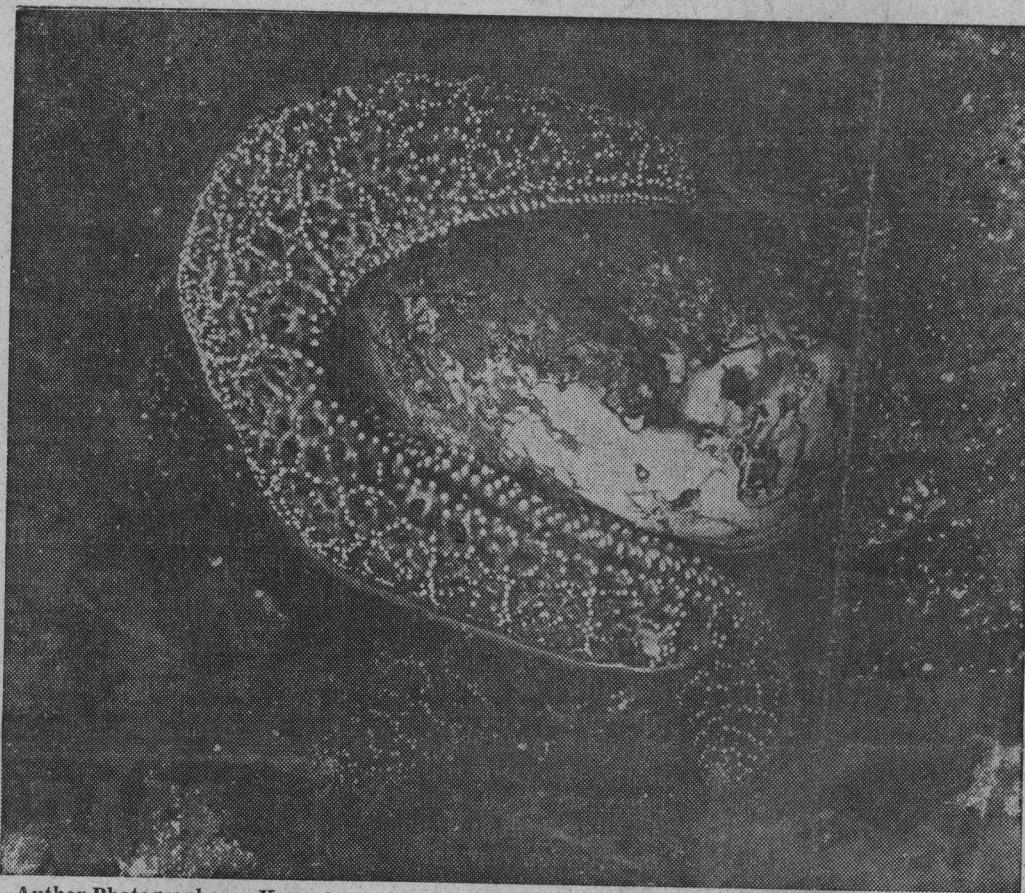
The rate of growth depends upon the abundance of food. A well-fed specimen may be many times the size of a poorly fed one at the same age. Starfish may go for months without food, but during this time growth ceases. Each species has its own average age limit. Some, like pisaster, may live for 20 years.

### CAPITOLA'S DEPUTY

#### CLERK BACK AT WORK

Mrs. Dorothy Weynacht, deputy city clerk of Capitola, returned to work Thursday after suffering from an attack of pneumonia one month ago. The clerk declared Friday morning "I am feeling really wonderful." She said she has quit smoking after 17 years. For a while she will work only half-days due to doctor's orders.

## Starfish Favors Abalone, Too



Author-Photographer Ken Legg, the conductor of this column, feared to print this picture because he said it would only add to hatred of the starfish, but he points out that the abalone which is being eaten by the starfish must have been diseased or the starfish never could have removed it from its rock.

## Propositions Cover Churches, County Charters And Courts

By Joseph J. Lipper

Sacramento (P).—Courts, county charters, church parking lots . . . These are some of the matters included in the 19 propositions

In 16—The state constitution currently specifies the time limits for filing petitions with the state supreme court for hearing

## Santa Cruz MLS Exhibitions CREATING

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