

## Partnerships and Education Help Save a Species

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In some parts of the world, the ear is a delicacy. The "sea ear," that is. The scientific name for Northern abalone (pictured) roughly translates to "sea ear." This mollusc is highly sought after for its edible meat and the nacre of its shell.

With the invention of scuba in the 1960s, abalone became easier to harvest and its population quickly declined. In 1990, there was a complete ban on collecting wild abalone. The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) registered Northern abalone as a threatened species in 1999. The federal government followed suit in 2003, listing abalone as threatened under the Species at Risk Act.

Regardless of its protected status, the abalone population is not recovering. A highly valuable commodity, the illegal harvesting, or poaching, of abalone continues to be a significant problem. Another roadblock to its recovery is its reproductive strategy. Abalone must group together to spawn; low concentrations of individuals make it hard for spawn to reach other abalone. Add to this the fact that abalone has a slow growth rate. With less than one per-

cent reaching adulthood and reproductive age, the challenge of population recovery intensifies.

In a partnership between the Bamfield Marine Sciences Centre and the Huu-ay-aht First Nations, the Bamfield HUU-ay-aht Community Abalone Project (BCHAP) aims to replenish wild stocks of abalone. After a strict and lengthy permit process, the Shaw Ocean Discovery Centre was granted permission from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to display these threatened molluscs. The Centre

attained its 10 northern abalone from the BCHAP. They are showcased in a habitat similar to that in the wild – a rocky shore with fast water flow.

Along with the hard work of the BCHAP, a key part to the recovery of abalone stocks is education. A rare glimpse at a threatened species can double as a teaching tool.

"We wanted to put this species on display to help our visitors identify abalone if they see it being taken from our shoreline," says Mike Anderson, head aquarist at the Shaw Ocean Discovery Centre. "If

people can recognize them, then we have a much better chance of being able to replenish them and help remove abalone from the list of threatened species."

Familiarize yourself with the appearance of abalone and report any harvesting activity to 1-800-465-4336. The hard work of the BCHAP and the sharply trained eye of passionate citizens can help save this species from extinction. And if anyone offers you an ear for dinner, it is best to decline. 🌊

