

Starfish making comeback after syndrome killed millions

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This July 31, 2010 file photo, shows a starfish clings to a rock near Haystack Rock during low tide in Cannon Beach, Ore. Starfish are making a comeback on the West Coast, four years after a mysterious syndrome killed millions of them. From 2013 to 2014, Sea Star Wasting Syndrome hit sea stars from British Columbia to Mexico. Now the species is rebounding with sea stars being spotted in Southern California tide pools and elsewhere, the Orange County Register reported Tuesday, Dec. 26, 2017. (AP Photo/Rick Bowmer, File)

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mysterious syndrome killed millions of them.

From 2013 to 2014, Sea Star Wasting Syndrome hit sea [stars](#) from British Columbia to Mexico. The starfish would develop lesions and then disintegrate, their arms turning into blobs of goo.

The cause is unclear but researchers say it may be a virus.

But now, the species is rebounding. Sea stars are being spotted in Southern California tide pools and elsewhere, the Orange County Register reported Tuesday.

"They are coming back, big time," Darryl Deleske, aquarist for the Cabrillo Marine Aquarium in Los Angeles, told the newspaper.

"It's a huge difference," Deleske said. "A couple of years ago, you wouldn't find any. I dove all the way as far as Canada, specifically looking for sea stars, and found not a single one."

Similar die-offs of starfish on the West Coast were reported in the 1970s, '80s and '90s, but the latest outbreak was far larger and more widespread, according to a report by researchers at the University of Santa Cruz.

Beginning with ochre stars off Washington state, the disease spread, killing off mottled stars, leather stars, sunflower stars, rainbows and six-armed stars.

It hit Southern California by December 2013.

"When it did (arrive), you just started to see them melt everywhere," said Deleske. "You'd see an arm here, an arm there."

The recovery has been promising.

Four adult sea stars, each about 7 to 8 inches long, were spotted this month at Crystal Cove State Park in Newport Beach.

"It's a treasure we always hope to find," said Kaitlin Magliano, education coordinator at the Crystal Cove Conservancy.

"We lost all of them," she said. "It's good to see we have some surviving and thriving . Maybe the next generation will be more resilient."

The stars aren't out of danger yet.

The wasting syndrome never completely disappeared in Northern and Central California and it has reappeared in the Salish Sea region of Washington state, according to a November report by the University of Santa Cruz.

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