

# Pacific footballfish makes rare appearance on Orange County beach

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For the second time in three years, a rare and otherworldly looking black anglerfish was found at Newport Beach's Crystal Cove State Park, showing up on Friday the 13th with its gaping mouth, jagged, translucent teeth and spiny dorsal fin.

Officials from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife identified the aquatic creature as being a Pacific footballfish, one of 200 species of anglerfish worldwide.

The female specimen is roughly 14 inches, measuring from mouth to tail fin, according to Michelle Horeczko, a senior environmental scientist supervisor with the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

"There are only approximately 30 or so specimens that have been collected of this species globally, which makes this find valuable and may add to what is known about their [life history](#)," Horeczko said in an email.

The difference between the female and male version of the footballfish is noticeable.

The female's dorsal fin protrudes far from the body. At the end of its first spine is a glowing bulb that functions as a lure and resembles a small lantern guiding the fish in the darkness of the deep sea. That bioluminescent tip is not for vision, but rather attracts prey that spot the glow.

The [female fish](#) can grow to 24 inches, according to state park officials, while the [male fish](#) is rarely bigger than an inch.

The fish generally lives well below the surface, as far as 3,000 feet down, according to state park officials.

Seasonal lifeguard Sierra Fockler found the deceased but intact footballfish on Oct. 13 at 2:30 p.m. while walking near the lifeguard headquarters building on Moro Beach, located within Crystal Cove, according to state parks officials.

The carcass was handed over to fish and wildlife personnel, who examined the specimen at the Marine Field Lab at the AltaSea campus in San Pedro.

The footballfish was turned over to the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles, "so that the specimen can be preserved and available for [scientific research](#)," according to Horeczko.

The [museum](#) took possession of the last footballfish discovered at Crystal Cove in May 2021 and displayed it in its "New Discoveries" exhibit that year.

Dr. William Ludt, the museum's associate curator of ichthyology, or fish studies, told Spectrum One News in 2021 that he was excited about the discovery because "it's an extremely rare specimen."

"Having one wash up in the condition that it's in is extraordinary," Ludt said.

Horeczko said not enough information exists to determine why these fish beached themselves.

Another footballfish came ashore in December 2021 in Encinitas.

"It is unknown what causes these [fish](#) to strand, or why we have had two in recent years at this location," Horeczko said.

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