



## Collector's log: A rare encounter with the crevice kelpfish

by Stefan Linquist

It's 8:20 a.m. as we slide out of an aluminum skiff into the chilly waters off Terrace Beach. For most of the year these bays on the outer shore of Ucluelet are pounded relentlessly by wind and waves. This morning the sea is calm. The tide is at its lowest, drawn back like an emerald blanket by the recent full-moon. A tangled bank of marine diversity rises in layers above our heads as we probe with hand-nets under slippery rocks. We are in search of a rare species for display at the Ucluelet Mini-Aquarium. The Crevice Kelpfish is a reclusive organism that ranges from Baja Mexico to northern California. It has been recorded in only one more northerly location, here outside Ucluelet, and is not known to occur anywhere else in this far north.

Crevice Kelpfish live amongst seaweed on the exposed shore. It's a nice life, if you can stand it. The steady surge offers a constant supply of nutrients. But most animals inhabiting this hostile environment, the barnacles, some mollusks, and only the hardiest of anemones, cling tightly to the substrate. The Crevice Kelpfish tucks away into small cracks to avoid being thrashed. It must choose its moments carefully, rare respites like these, when things are calm enough to come out and feed or mate.

We managed to collect five kelpfish that morning. If you visit the Mini-Aquarium to see these elusive creatures look for a small (2-3 inch long) bottom-dweller with a pointy snout and a sail-like dorsal fin. Crevice Kelpfish hop along the bottom on two modified pectoral fins that resemble small hooves. Like chameleons, they accommodate their body-pigment to the local environment. Initially, our specimens came dressed in deep burgundy to match the leafy red algae carpeting their rocky home. After just a few days on display these specimens morphed –one kelpfish became dark brown with bright silver patches, another individual turned lime green. As per the Mini-Aquarium's policy, these graceful creatures will be released back into the wild at season's end in September.

**To learn more about local marine creatures please download our Life History Manual**

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