Name_____ Date_____

Basket Stars

A research boat in Alaskan waters was fishing for the crew's nightly dinner when a curious, plant-like creature was hauled onto the boat. The crew wanted to throw it back quickly, but the researchers onboard wanted a closer look. The plant-like creature pulled from the dim-lit bottom had curled itself into a ball, but the researchers identified the usually fragile, lacy, branching animal as a Basket Star, a cousin of the common sea star.

Not many people are fortunate enough to see Basket Stars because they live in very deep water, curling themselves up during the day in dim-lit areas and spreading themselves out at night with their tentacles against the current trying to catch plankton or other microorganisms. Plankton includes lots of tiny animals and plants in the ocean that drift in the current –flowing water in the ocean. The expanded animal acts like a net catching its food with its thin, long tentacles that look like plant vines. Small hooks on the surface of the tentacles catch the food. Basket Stars do not have suckers at the end of their tube feet, as do common sea stars.

These spiny creatures have a central disk from which the tentacles radiate, or spread out, that can be up to almost six inches in diameter. They often attach themselves to something for support against the current. The tentacles can reach up to twenty-seven inches in length. Basket stars have a spiky endoskeleton - an internal skeleton.

Basket stars have been found all over the world as deep as 6,600 feet. They are usually tan, beige, orange or pink in color and have a somewhat mottled, or irregularly colored appearance. When spread out fully, this lacy, fragile looking creature is quite beautiful, but when disturbed it wraps itself into a knotty ball.

This is one animal that really needs to be appreciated in its natural habitat. Sometimes they are mistakenly caught by fishermen and brought to aquariums for the public to appreciate. But they are very difficult to keep in an aquarium as their needs are very specific. Mostly videos of deep sea dives and photographs taken by researchers give us a glimpse into the life of this delicate invertebrate.

Name_____ Date_____

Basket Stars Questions

Using the article or a dictionary, define the vocabulary words from the article.

plankton

mottled

endoskeleton

current

tentacles

radiate

microorganism

habitat

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Basket Stars Questions (Cont'd)

Answer the following questions using complete sentences:

1. Where do Basket Stars live?

2. How do they capture food?

3. What do they eat?

4. How are their tentacles different from those of common sea stars?

5. What do they look like?

6. How do they look different in daylight and at night?

7. Why would they attaché themselves to something in the ocean?

Name_____ Date_____

Basket Stars Answers

plankton – plants and animals usually small that drift in the ocean currents

endoskeleton – an internal skeleton

tentacles – long, flexible tube like organs of many invertebrates

microorganism – a tiny organism only visible under a microscope

mottled – irregular patches of color

current – a flow of water within the ocean

radiate – spread out from a central point

habitat – where a plant or animal lives

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Basket Stars Answers (Cont'd)

Reading Comprehension Answer Sheet

1. Where do Basket Stars live?

Basket Stars live all over the world in deep ocean waters up to 6,000 feet.

2. How do Basket Stars capture food?

They spread their tentacles out as a basket against the current of the ocean.

3. What do they eat?

They eat plankton, tiny microorganisms that drift in the current.

4. How are their tentacles different from those of common sea stars?

They don't have suckers at the end of their tube feet as do common sea stars.

5. What do they look like?

Basket Stars have a central disk up to six inches in diameter from which long, thin tentacles radiate. The tentacles can be as long as twenty seven inches in length. They have a spiky endoskeleton. They are orange, pink, beige, or brown in somewhat mottled coloring.

6. How do they look different in daylight and at night?

During the day they hide in dimly lit areas of the deep sea curled up until night when in the darker waters, they spread themselves out looking for food.

7. Why would they attach themselves to something in the ocean?

They attached themselves for support against the current.