

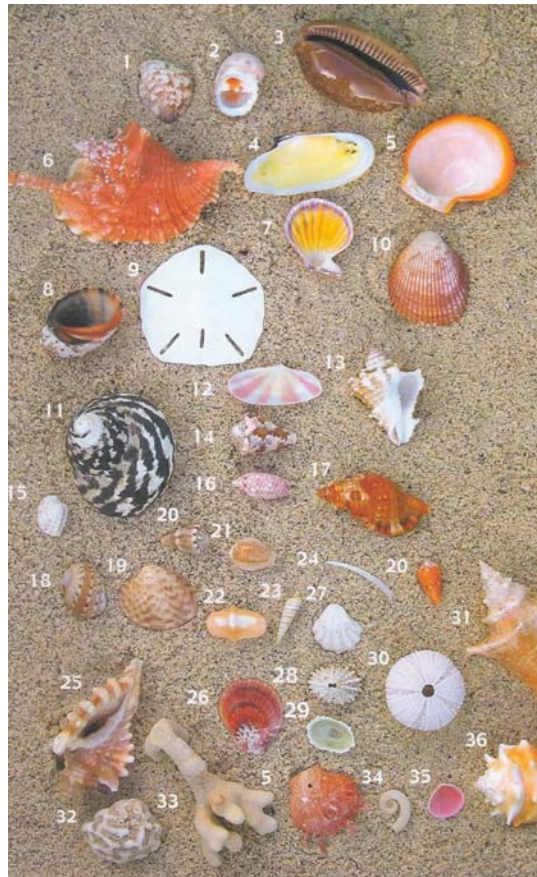
# Take memories, Leave footsteps

Over 2.25 million people visit the US Virgin Islands every year. Visitors come here to experience the beauty of our natural resources, the lush mountainous terrain, the crystal blue waters, and the wonderful climate. The Virgin Islands as well as the other Caribbean islands contain some of the richest terrestrial and marine environments in the world. The Virgin Islands is home to four of the world's seven sea turtle species and holds 14% of the world's coral reef species!

The highlight of your trip may include walking along stretches of sandy white beaches and collecting the various treasures you find but, Virgin Islands law prohibits the removal of corals, shells or sand from the marine environment or beaches. The beautiful shell collection you found on the beach will be confiscated from you upon departure from the territory. Corals, shells, sea fans and sand need to remain where they are because they play a vital role in the health of marine ecosystems.

This brochure will discuss the important role various "treasures" found along the shoreline play in the dynamic interactions of the marine environment and why removal of sea life whether dead or alive can jeopardize the overall health of the marine system.

Most shells found along the shoreline or in the water once contained a living animal called a mollusk. The common names of mollusks that form the shells found on the



beaches are snails and clams. Mollusks make up one of the largest groups in the animal kingdom, second only to the insects.

Mollusks are cold-blooded animals with soft bodies. They are unsegmented and have no internal skeleton. The animal's shell is formed from calcium carbonate material secreted by a fleshy mantle covering the body. The shell supports the body and provides shelter, including protection from predators. A mollusk's shell is never shed while the animal is alive.

## LOCAL DO'S AND DON'TS

**DO-** Learn more about our natural resources and their value to all of us.

**DO-** Protect coral reefs and seagrass and algal beds. Without them, the sand supply for our beaches would disappear and eventually, so would our sandy shorelines.

**DO-** Report violations to DPNR's Division of Environmental Enforcement, St. Croix 340-773-5774 or St. Thomas/ St. John 340-774-3320 ext. 5106

**DON'T -** Remove natural resources from our shorelines. Sand, shells, sea fans, live rocks, coral pieces and beach rocks are all natural resources.



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## Virgin Islands Natural Resources

*Protecting Our Islands for  
Everyone!*



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	Common Name
1	Atlantic Strawberry Cockle
2	Bleeding Toothed Nerite
3	Measled Cowrie
4	White Sunrise Tellin
5	Atlantic Thorny Oyster
6	Rooster Tail Conch
7	Little Knobby Scallop
8	Wide-mouthed Rock Snail
9	Six-Keyhole Sand Dollar
10	Magnum cockle
11	West Indian Top Snail
12	Sunrise Tellin
13	Caribbean Vase Snail
14	Crown cone
15	Cross-barred Chione
16	Netted Olive
17	Atlantic Hairy Triton
18	Colorful Moon Snail
19	Calico clam
20	Mouse Cone
21	Atlantic Yellow Cowrie
22	Flamingo Tongue
23	Common American Anger
24	Tusk shell
25	Angular Triton
26	Ornate Scallop
27	Kitten's Paw
28	Knobby Keyhole Limpet
29	Barbados Keyhole Limpet
30	Variegated Urchin
31	Queen Conch
32	Brain coral fragment
33	Finger coral fragment
34	Common Spirula
35	Rosy Strigella
36	Fighting Conch

As the animal grows, new shell material is added to the edge of the aperture (opening) of the shell. Like the growth rings in a tree's trunk, the shell material records the life history of the animal that lives inside.

Even after the animal that once created the shell has died, the shell plays an important role in the marine ecosystem.

Unoccupied shells become homes for an assortment of other marine organisms, such as soldier and hermit crabs.

Some organisms such as sea anemones take up residence on the surface of some shells.

Studies have been done on a number of species to determine the size and age at reproduction. This is the size that these species can be harvested without endangering the population.

Virgin Islands law prohibits the collection of shells, corals, sea fans, etc. without proper collecting permits. Imagine the millions of visitors to the territory each year taking a "token" back home. The collective effect would be disastrous to the environment. Contact the Division of Fish and Wildlife for information on species that may be harvested.



Species that may be recreationally harvested include:

Conch shells that are 9 – 1/2 inches long, or have a lip thickness of 3/8 inch.

Whelk shells 2-7/16 inches in diameter, or greater.

Spiny lobster skeletons that have a 3-1/2 inch carapace length.

If you enter the United States or Puerto Rico with any natural resources from the USVI, except those listed above or unless you have a permit from the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, you are in violation of Federal laws concerning the illegal import of natural resources



There are other restrictions on taking the spiny lobster. A female laden with eggs is called a "berried-female" and in this stage a female lobster cannot be legally harvested even if she is of a legal harvest size. By allowing the lobster to lay her eggs you are helping to increase the population.

Dead coral is also an extremely important part of coral reef ecosystems. While alive they provide habitat and food for hundreds of marine organisms. Once dead, they continue to provide habitat and are also instrumental in making sand.



All natural materials that wash up on the beach are subject to wave action. The constant movement and grinding action wears down the hard parts of shells, corals and bones. These worn parts make up the sand on the beach. Please help us maintain our sandy beaches by not removing the material that nature uses to make the sand.

You may enter the United States or Puerto Rico with natural resources, from the USVI, only if you have an export permit from the VI Department of Planning and Natural Resources. Otherwise you are in violation of Federal laws concerning importation of natural resources.

Make sure your trip is an enjoyable one and take as many pictures as you want. However, please leave our natural resources where they belong, here in the USVI.

For more information on this and other natural resource topics please visit our web site at [www.vifishandwildlife.com](http://www.vifishandwildlife.com).