

Brief reports by members based on their observations of nature


## Starfishes in Sri Lanka ECHINODERMATA, ASTEROIDEA



Starfish, also called sea stars, are echinoderms— or spiny-skinned animals. The name derives from the phylum name 'ECHINODERMATA', from the Greek 'echinos' (hedgehog, a spiny mammal) and 'derma' (skin). Members of the phylum have five-fold radial symmetry, a calcareous skeleton that may be reduced to spicules embedded in skin, spines (suppressed in some) and a water-vascular system that operates tube feet. The phylum includes -

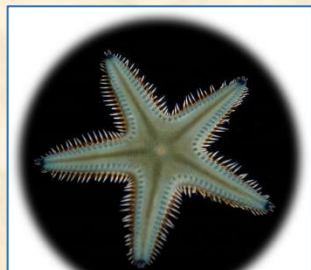


starfishes, sea urchins, brittle stars, feather stars and sea cucumbers.

The lead image shows a crown-of-thorns starfish (*Achinaster planci*) that has recently eaten some coral (white, bottom left). At bottom right is fragmented, old, dead coral. These animals evert their stomach lining, spreads it over coral, digests the soft tissues of the coral, absorbs the nutrients, and then withdraws its stomach, leaving the coral skeleton untouched. Remnants of living coral tissue at the periphery is able to grow over the killed area and re-establish the coral colony. Shown below are part of the starfish diversity of Sri Lanka. We have about 50 species in our waters, a number of them collected for the aquarium trade, denoted by the pictogram .



*Asterina burtoni* 3 cm



*Astropecten vappa* 4.6 cm



*Choriaster granulatus* 30 cm



*Culcita schmideliana* 25 cm



*Echinaster* sp. 17.5 cm



*Fromia indica* 7 cm



*Gomophia egyptiaca* 13 cm



*Linckia multifora* 15 cm



*Paraferdina sohariae* 9 cm



*Pentaceraster* sp. juv. 10 cm



*Protoreaster lincki* 21 cm

All images by Malik Fernando from living specimens—one drawing, two underwater pictures, of which one from an original image by Arjan Rajasuriya. Darrel Fryer is thanked for supplying many of the specimens.

More information is available from <https://docmalikfern.com/asteroid-ea-starfish/>