

Flame shells (*Limaria hians*)

Habitat

Flame shells live primarily in Scotland but they also can live all over the northeast Atlantic. They tend to make their nests in muddy



Loch Alsh - Photographer - Graham Saunders © Marine Scotland

gravel tide swept areas of salt lochs. Flame shells appear to build these complex beds primarily in Scotland and in one known location in Ireland. They have a much wider distribution as a species but only occur in low numbers that don't come together to make beds in the way as they do here.



Flame shell beds



Loch Carron - photographer Flora Kent

They are formed by the intertwining of the byssus threads (a bundle of filaments secreted by many species of bivalve

mollusc that function to attach it to a solid surface) of *Limaria* with seaweed, maerl, shells and stones creating a unique habitat that consolidates the underlying sediments providing a surface which other animals and plants can attach to.

Why are they so special?

Flame shells play a vital part in our marine eco-system. To start, they build nests that support many different kinds of life forms from fish to algae, crabs to micro plankton and seaweed. In some areas flame shells cover large areas of salt water loch sea beds. They hold



Outer Lochcarron - photographer Ben James

together multiple parts of rock and maerl and that supports many other life forms. They support so much! They may only be 5cm long but they do so much to help all the other creatures,

especially by providing nursery beds for many species that local fisherman rely on for their livelihoods – like scallops.

The shells

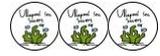
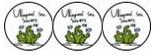


The actual shell looks a lot like a clam shell that has



been squeezed into a narrower shape. Most of the time they are a white, cream or brown colour and have very small groves in them and are corrugated around the

ends.



Tentacles

If you look at any flame shell you will see that its main attraction is its brightly coloured tentacles that come from the opening valve at the mouth of the shell.

These tentacles are really sticky and are used to keep predators like crabs at bay while the flame shells build their reefy homes. These sticky tentacles are to help build reefs and their

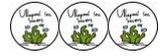
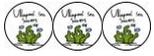


Port Appin Narrows, Loch Linnhe
Graham Saunders © Marine Scotland

homes. These reefs are very easy to smash and

when they do it looks very drastic as they tend not just to break but to shatter into multiple pieces.





Lochs

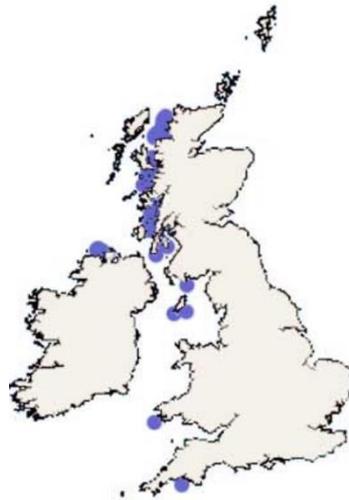
Some of the other lochs in Scotland that have flame shells as residents are:

Loch Sunart

Loch Alsh

Scapa Flow

Loch Carron



Loch Fyne

Loch Broom

Loch Creran

Inner sound between Skye and the mainland

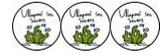
Dredged!

In 2017 Loch Carron was dredged up damaging the sea floor and smashing all that was there. Lots of flame shells were killed but the bed is expected to recover, although this may take up to 10 years!



Pic: Andy Jackson





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Ben James

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Species Champion for flame shells
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Noel Hawkins

Living Seas Scotland



www.ullapoolseasavers.com

