

Some observations of mass die-offs of gumboot chitons
submitted by Rick Harbo



A gumboot chiton that was washed ashore at Marrowstone Point in May.

Pieter Van Will reports this April, 2009, "on the Easter weekend, my family encountered a die-off of gumboot chitons [*Cryptochiton stelleri* Middendorff, 1847], while staying out at the Cluxewe River, near Port McNeill. We spent most of our time in the tide pools just east of the campground. At first we saw the odd one but then the numbers started to add up to around 30 dead gumboot chitons in tide pools over about a 500 meter portion of beach."

Roland Anderson of the Seattle Aquarium comments on a similarly reported die-off of 68 Gumboot chitons, *Cryptochiton stelleri*, washed up on shore of Ft. Ebey State Park on Whidbey Island, Washington, February 2009. "I've seen this die-off of gumboot chitons in years past, always about this time of year. (Jan./Feb.). There are a number of glacial erratic rocks offshore seen while diving, solitary rocks, with gumboot chitons living on them. These are two-three foot rocks. Some have kelp growing on them. I suspect the chitons get too big for their rocks and get washed off in winter storms only to be found on the beach in early spring when tides and weather allow people to walk the beaches again.

"This die-off has been brought to my attention at least three other years at this time so I'm pretty confident in my assessment. This does not happen at other times of the year."