

Cape Lookout Fun at the Cape



Cape Lookout



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Tropical Treasures

Seashells aren't the only interesting finds available to beachcombers at Cape Lookout. A walk on the beach may turn up visitors from the Caribbean. Several kinds of floating seeds, including coconuts, are carried north by the Gulf stream and wash onto the beaches of the park.

True sea beans are round, dark brown, nickel sized seeds with a black band around their edge. These seeds are produced by a vine with yellow flowers growing along streams in the Caribbean. Sea hearts are larger, chocolate colored seeds with a distinctive notch in the margin. The vine that produces them has seed pods up to six feet long, making it one of the longest of all fruits. Sea coconuts are ball shaped, two inch seeds with a cracked hard skin. The seed is produced by a palm tree that grows near the seashore.

All these seeds contain air-filled spaces, which make them float, and water resistant coats to protect the seed from salt water. The seeds can survive a long journey on the ocean and still be able to germinate into new plants. These characteristics enable the plant to spread into new areas far from the parent plant.



Top: Sea Coconut
Left: True Sea Bean, Right: Unidentified Gourd
Bottom: Sea Heart

A Different Kind of Fall Colors

Cape Lookout is on a natural highway of animals moving north and south with the changing seasons. Birds using the skies and fish in the ocean and sounds move past the park in large numbers. In the fall, butterflies are some of the smaller migrants found in the park.

As fall wildflowers bloom, butterflies take advantage of the source of food to refuel on their trip south. Monarchs, with their familiar orange and black patterns are some of the first to arrive. Yellow sulfurs add color to the dunes and favor wild bean flowers as a source of nectar. Orange fritillaries are most common later in the fall, feeding on seaside goldenrod and cottonbush. The less familiar skippers, with their wings held high above their bodies, visit morning glory and other flowers in the park.



Monarch

As the cooler winds of autumn begin to blow, butterflies are one of the many groups of animals that use the park as a refueling station on their journey south. Along with blooming fall wildflowers, migrating butterflies add color to the islands that make up Cape Lookout National Seashore.



Eastern Tiger Swallowtail on the Sand

Wild Horse Watching Tips, Shackleford Banks



Shackleford's 110-130 horses live in about 30 groups called "harems" (stallions, mares and foals) and "bachelor bands" (only stallions). They may be seen in all parts of the island but you may need to hunt around a bit to find them.

Remember that the horses are wild – they must find their own food and water and protect themselves from danger. Wild horses see humans and dogs as something dangerous. If you get too close to the horses, they may defend themselves by charging, kicking or biting. For you and your pet's safety:

- Watch the horses from a safe distance. If the horse stops what it's doing to stare directly at you, stop there. If it starts to move away, you are already too close.
- Bring binoculars and use a telephoto lens so you won't disturb the horses or endanger yourself.
- Keep your dog on a leash for it's and the horse's safety (and it's the law!).
- Always carry fresh water for yourself and your pet. During the warm months, bug repellent is recommended.