

Living and Feeding

The study of fossils and fossil morphology can tell something of the living conditions and feeding habits of the creatures whose remains have been preserved.

The following is a brief summary of the terms used to describe these different habitats and feeding habits, when discussing the individual species.

Habitats

Epifauna

Live on the sea-floor

Infauna

Buried within the sediment

Sessile

Stay in one place

Vagrant

Frequently move around

Benthic

"Bottom dwellers", including both infaunal and epifaunal creatures.

Pelagic

Living above the sea floor, in the water column.

Planktonic

Pelagic animals, which float or swim at the mercy of currents and winds

Nektonic

Active swimmers

Feeding methods

Predators

Hunters and consumers of live animal prey

Scavengers

Consumers of dead and rotting animal material

Grazers

Those who scrape food (usually algae) from sediment or rock surfaces, or who graze on large plants

Suspension feeders

Those who strain food particles from seawater

Parasites

Those with a long-term attachment to a host, which serves as a food source but who gains nothing in return (unlike symbiotic creatures)

Deposit feeders

Those who eat sediment (swallowers) or select particulate grains (collectors)