



Bladder Chain Wrack

Stephanocystis osmundacea

*Originally named Cystoseira; Cysto is Greek for bladder or pouch; seira meaning chain or rope.
Now known as Stephanocystis, Stephano meaning crown in Greek.*

WHERE IT’S FOUND

Bladder chain wrack thrives in the shallower edges of subtidal kelp forests and in the intertidal zone of North America’s Pacific Coast.

MEET THE SEAWEED

Growing up to 24 feet tall, bladder chain wrack has two distinct sections: tough, rounded blades at the base and delicate, golden chains above. The chains rise towards the ocean surface, growing profusely in summer and creating a floating canopy. Each winter, the seaweed sheds this bulky top layer to withstand winter storms and intense waves.

Young bladder chain germlings have a difficult time getting started. They need open space, sunlight, and a rocky landscape to latch onto. But, if they can survive for at least six months, they have a good chance of living between five to ten years. This low “turnover” rate makes bladder chain wrack particularly susceptible to pressures from climate change, human foraging, and other habitat stressors.

A FORGOTTEN SPECIMEN

When the Spanish ships *Atrevida* and *Descubierta* stopped in Monterey, CA in 1791, naturalist Thaddeus Haenke collected a sample of bladder chain wrack. The expedition, led by Alessandro Malaspina, surveyed the harbor and met the Spanish and Ohlone residents. While Haenke sent his new finding back to Spain, it was forgotten when expedition leader Malaspina was arrested for his part in a conspiracy to overthrow the government.

One year later, Archibald Menzies and the Vancouver Expedition, a British endeavor, collected a sample of bladder chain wrack. Menzies was credited for the discovery of the “type” specimen of this seaweed.

