

What's in a Name?

At the end of my book, *The Curious World of Seaweed*, I reiterate my love for the visual elements of the story; seaweeds offer surprising shapes and colors, forms that feel unfamiliar and yet alluring. Seeing is an alternative to our verbal narrative, a reminder to reorient our perceptions, abandon our land-based point of view, and be more fluid in our thinking about ocean life. But knowing the names of the seaweeds is part of this journey and lets our encounters with them at the seashore feel as if amongst old friends.

My resolve to recognize the seaweeds continues. To know the common names in English and the binomial species names in Latin is only a beginning. To feel a greater kinship to the tidepool flora I want to know how it is called for other people in other places. I have learned that along the coast at the very north of California *ghvtlh-k'vsh* is how Tolowa speakers call the bull kelp (*Nereocystis leutkeana*) that make up the kelp forests off that coastline. Farther south The Kashia Band of the Pomo know this same majestic kelp as *chainama*. In Kodiak, Alaska this same foundational organism is *nasquluq* in the Alutiiq language, and Russian sailors of the 19th century called it sea otter cabbage. This multiplicity of names highlights the seaweeds and kelps as intrinsically of their world, an ocean universe we humans try to interpret with language and words.

Naming for us humans creates connections. Empathy for the seaweeds starts with the sheer wonder of form, an attraction towards the beautiful and the strange. It is then built upon by a lineage of learning across time to create complex portraits of the algae as unique and intricate organisms, and this in turn leads to its scientific name, its place in the Linnean taxonomic system, so that everyone everywhere can talk about the same entity. But there are other deep and place specific relationships to the seaweeds that are reflected in seaweed names by local language speakers. These names signify a plethora of relationships to the intertidal realm, relationships that value this world of richness and wonder.

Cryptopleura ruprechtiana

