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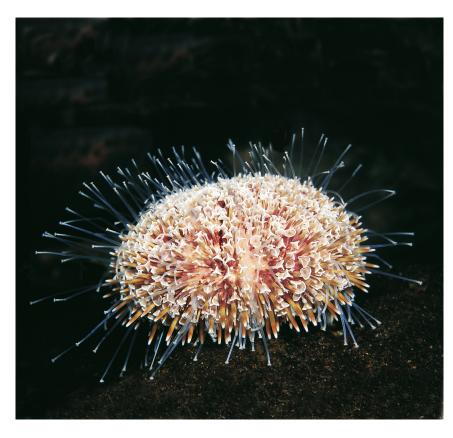


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All sea urchins have globular bodies covered with rows of protective spines. Penetration of the spines is usually no more than an irritation to humans, but some species have hollow spines that break off in wounds and inject a toxin that can be extremely painful, though not life-threatening. The urchin shown here (the Flower urchin Toxopneustes pileolus) is a tropical species that has short spines and long, transparent, sucker-tipped tubefeet that it uses for locomotion. Its surface is also dotted with attractive flower-like 'pedicellaria' - three-jawed structures that can inject venom to discourage predators and stop other species settling on the urchin. The Flower urchin has particularly potent venom, being potentially lethal to humans.

Photo and text: George Branch Email: mbranch@mweb.co.za

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