



Wheke

The octopus is the greatest escape artist of the marine world. Found mostly around rocky outcrops, these night predators stalk their prey keeping a watchful eye out for something tasty to pass by. At first the octopus can appear to quite dull in colour. Yet they change colour fast and have a greater variety of colours than a chameleon.

The octopus lives on average for only a year and is considered one of the most advanced and complex species of the mollusc family. Their sac like body disguises a hard beak, enclosed in a mantle, that they use to bite its prey. Octopuses sometimes eat mussels and other bivalves. They can get through the shells by either, pulling them apart with their strong arms or by boring a hole in the shell with their radula. The radula is like a tongue except that it has a row of “teeth” on it. The octopus has eight arms and unlike its cousin the squid, does not have any tentacles.



This animal has quite a lot of muscle in their arms and mantle. The biggest difference between an octopus's muscles and ours is that they do not have bones to attach their muscles to. This allows them to work their arms into tight places and to be very adaptable. However, they don't have the leverage that we have with bones. When looking at an object, they are not able to sense how heavy it is. Instead they pass their suckers over the surface of an object, tasting through their suckers and deciding whether to take or reject the object.

Diet

Octopus live on a diet of fish, crustaceans and molluscs however their favourite food is crayfish. Octopus have excellent eyesight and will stalk their prey in much the same way as a cat will, hiding behind rocks and pouncing on unsuspecting prey. If their prey can move, an octopus will often swim above it and then spread its arms parachuting onto it. In this way the octopus uses its body like a net to catch its prey.



Female octopuses will not eat after they have laid their eggs – not even after the eggs have hatched. When they have laid their eggs, females will guard them and look after them by keeping them clean and scaring away predators. After the eggs have hatched the female will die.

Strange Octopus facts

An octopus can regenerate a lost arm and it is quite common to find octopuses missing arms in nature. Octopuses have very advanced brains for invertebrates with two thirds of their nerves in their body and arms, not the brain! This gives the arms a lot of local control. It also allows the detached arm to continue to crawl, suckers to suck, and chromatophores to change colour - all of which makes an effective decoy.

Another unique feature of the octopus is that it has three hearts!! Each gill has its own heart to pump blood through. Blood picks up oxygen in the gills, but after going through all those tiny little capillaries, it loses its pressure. The third heart then pumps the oxygenated blood to the tissues all over the body. We mammals do this with one heart. One side pumps blood to our lungs where it picks up oxygen, it then returns to the other side which pumps blood out to the tissues.

If an octopus is stressed it usually changes colour to either white or red. When an octopus is threatened and changing colour has not deterred their predator, they will use a cloud of ink to escape. This ink is contained in an ink sac that is connected to the end of the digestive system.