

COMMON OCTOPUS

SCIENTIFIC NAME: **Octopus vulgaris**

CONSERVATION STATUS: **Least Concern (LC)**

FACT FILE

- PHYLUM: MOLUSCS
- CLASS: CEPHALOPODS
- ORDER: OCTOPODA
- FAMILY : OCTOPODIDAE
- CARNIVORE
- FAVOURITE FOOD: CRABS
- MASTER OF DISGUISE
- 3 HEARTS
- LENGTH: 60-100CM
- LIFESPAN: 1-2 YEARS



Octopuses are ocean creatures that are most famous for having eight arms and bulbous heads. Some other fun facts: They have three hearts and blue blood; they squirt ink to deter predators; and being boneless, they can squeeze into (or out of) tight spaces. The common octopus is a highly intelligent, active predator. It even has a secret weapon - special glands produce a venom that it uses to incapacitate its prey!



SUPER SLUGS

Tentacles, large eyes that look nearly but not quite creepily like humans and a considerable intelligence...standard recipe for a science-fiction alien and a pretty good fit for an octopus. Our smart, eight-armed wonder is a relative of the snails and slugs that slime their way to your veg patch. They are most definitely molluscs, even though they have taken a dramatically divergent evolutionary path from snails. One theory is that losing their shells gave them greater mobility and flexibility of behaviour, and in order to make this strategy work in a challenging world they evolved intelligence.

Octopuses are the only invertebrates known to use tools, and have been seen manipulating coconut shells to create a safe hiding place. Likewise they are the only invertebrate to indulge in play: an octopus was left alone in an aquarium with nothing interesting happening, but was supplied with a plastic medicine bottle. It contrived a game where it fired the bottle across the tank so it was sent back by the aeration system; it did this 20 times before getting bored. In captivity they are always climbing out of tanks, sometimes to invade neighbouring tanks in search of food, excitement or even sex.

Here is a slug that stumbled upon kryptonite: one of Earth's more humbler creatures apparently got contaminated by an alien substance and then evolved not only different from its ancestors but disturbingly cleverer. As humans are to other vertebrates, octopuses are to other invertebrates, cleverer to an almost unnatural degree. The laws that govern experimentation on animals allow you pretty much free-rein on all invertebrates apart from cephalopods, the family that contain squid, cuttlefish and octopus. **These have been given honorary vertebrate status.**

ONE OF THE MOST STRIKING CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COMMON OCTOPUS IS THE WIDE ARRAY OF TECHNIQUES IT USES TO AVOID OR THWART ATTACKERS.

Camouflage

Its first—and most amazing—line of defence is its ability to hide in plain sight. Using a network of pigment cells and specialised muscles in its skin, this invertebrate can almost instantaneously match the colours, patterns, and even textures of its surroundings. Predators such as sharks, eels, and dolphins swim by without even noticing it.



Ink

When discovered, an octopus will release a cloud of black ink to obscure its attacker's view, giving it time to swim away. The ink even contains a substance that dulls a predator's sense of smell, making the fleeing octopus harder to track.

Evasive Behaviour

Fast swimmers, they can jet forward by expelling water through their mantles. And their soft bodies can squeeze into impossibly small cracks and crevices where predators can't follow. The octopus can also squeeze through any hole that's not smaller than its beak, the only hard part of its body. If all else fails, an octopus can lose an arm to escape a predator's grasp and regrow it later with no permanent damage. They also have beak-like jaws that can deliver a nasty bite, and venomous saliva, used mainly for subduing prey. They have been known to stuff their arms in the gills of attacking fish to stop it breathing and force it to release them.

Food

The common octopus's favourite food is crabs - in fact a pile of empty crab shells is normally a sign that a well-fed octopus is somewhere nearby! These piles of discarded shells are called a midden. Octopuses are pretty inactive during the daytime, so it's easier to spot them out and about on a night dive. They are masters of camouflage and will change colour and texture depending on their mood or the situation.



Did you know?

Female common octopuses are devoted mothers, watching over her eggs night and day and flushing them with water from her funnel in order to keep them aerated. She normally dies after they have hatched.

