

KIDS' PAGE

DISCOVER NEW AND EXCITING STUFF FROM THE ROYAL BC MUSEUM

OCTOPUSES

Octopuses live in all the world's oceans. They tend to be small in warm tropical waters and larger in colder waters. The largest octopus in the world, the Giant Pacific Octopus, lives in the North Pacific Ocean, including the coastal waters of British Columbia. Most male Giant Pacific Octopuses weigh about 25 kg and females average about 15 kg. The largest ever caught weighed about 270 kg and had an arm span of almost 10 metres!

An octopus has eight arms attached to its head around the mouth. Imagine if your arms and legs grew out of your face! The Giant Pacific Octopus has two rows of suckers on each arm and may have as many as 1,600 suckers in all. The octopus has many nerves in the arms and suckers and can actually taste with its suckers.

The octopus is a mollusc, a group of animals that includes snails, limpets, clams and oysters. It belongs to a smaller group of molluscs called the cephalopods, which means "head-footed", so named because the "feet" (arms) are attached to the head. Squids and cuttlefish are also cephalopods. These molluscs have been roaming the oceans for more than 450 million years.



An Octopus Beak

An octopus has no bones. The only hard part of its body is a beak, located in the mouth, made of a material similar to your fingernails. It uses its beak to kill prey and tear it into bite-size pieces. An octopus's bite is poisonous; the Blue-ringed Octopus of Australia has killed humans by biting them when defending itself.

The body of the octopus, called the mantle, looks like a bag. Inside the mantle are the stomach and all the other organs including three hearts.

The Giant Pacific Octopus has three hearts and blue blood.



Female octopus guarding eggs

A female Giant Pacific Octopus lays about 50,000 eggs and tends them for about six months. During this time she does not eat, but spends all her time protecting the eggs from other animals such as sea stars and crabs. She will only produce one nest in her life. When the babies hatch they are not giants like their mother but about the size of a grain of rice. They rise up to the surface layer of the ocean and stay there for about six weeks. When they grow large enough to survive on the bottom of the ocean the juvenile octopuses drift down again. They will take about three years to grow to full size.



Newly hatched octopus with eggs

A newly hatched Giant Pacific Octopus weighs about 0.03 grams, and is the size of a grain of rice. In three years they can grow to weigh over 30 kg. If people increased in weight this quickly, a baby weighing 3 kg at birth would weigh 3,000,000 kg when they were three years old.

When fleeing from a predator an octopus will sometimes squirt a cloud of ink into the water. This might startle or confuse the predator and temporarily conceal the octopus's escape route, giving it a few seconds to get to a place of safety.

The favourite foods of the Giant Pacific Octopus are crabs, shrimps and clams. They're not all that fussy, though: a large octopus will sometimes even eat a smaller octopus.

MAKE AN OCTOPUS

What you will need:

- a balloon
- 8 strips of paper or cloth about 1 cm wide: length and width can vary depending on the size of your balloon
- tape
- a felt pen

Blow the balloon up until it is the size you want the body of your octopus to be and tie it off. Tape the eight strips of cloth or paper around the balloon near the neck and draw eyes on your octopus. On a large piece of paper draw an underwater scene and put your octopus in front of it.

RAPID TRANSIT

Blow up a balloon, then without tying off the end let it go. What happens? Why? Octopuses use a similar technique to escape from predators or move quickly after their prey. By drawing water into its body an octopus can inflate itself with water like you inflated the balloon with air. By contracting strong muscles in its body the octopus then forces the water out through a small funnel located under the head. The large amount of water escaping from a small opening causes the octopus to jet backwards, just like the balloon did when the air quickly escaped through its narrow neck.

The octopus has a well-developed brain and excellent eyesight. It can instantly change the colour and texture of its skin to match its surroundings. This camouflage is an important method of protection from predators.

OCTOPUS WORD SEARCH

arms	crabs	ocean	beak	den										
octopus	camouflage	hunting	suckers	clams										
molluscs	swimming													
C	K	S	U	R	Z	Q	B	C	S	S	N	V	O	C
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O	C	E	A	N	C	Y	T	B	A	E	W	F	J	Y
C	D	P	Q	Q	E	N	A	M	O	K	S	U	O	O
T	R	C	R	A	C	E	S	U	S	C	V	L	L	M
O	Q	A	W	U	S	L	L	U	A	U	O	V	C	D
P	C	W	B	D	N	P	L	M	O	S	L	W	T	U
U	Y	N	N	S	H	U	O	O	S	W	I	M	M	Y
S	I	H	A	S	W	U	T	L	D	E	S	I	M	P
C	S	U	C	N	F	I	N	L	I	N	G	H	U	O
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