

Cuttlefish fact sheet



Cuttlefish



Information - www.ausmepa.org.au/poster
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There is an interesting group of animals with many arms and tentacles. These are the octopus, squid, cuttlefish and nautilus. Scientists call the shorter ones arms and the longer ones tentacles. The octopus has eight arms. The squid and cuttlefish have eight arms and two tentacles the nautilus has about 90 arms. In the centre of the arms and tentacles is a mouth with nine teeth. They all have eyes on the side of their head and are very intelligent. All these animals live in the sea. There are about 800 different animals in this group and more are still being found.

These animals are related to the shellfish such as snails and mussels. The nautilus grows a coiled shell. The white cuttlebone inside a cuttlefish is all that is left of its shell. The cuttlebone helps the animal to float higher and lower in the water. When the animal dies the cuttlebone does not rot and can be washed up on the beach. Sometimes, the cuttlebone has teeth marks from sharks, fish or seals which were eating it.

Cuttlefish can change colour very quickly. They do this to become camouflage. Their colours can change in an instant if they are excited or if they want to talk to another cuttlefish. . Squids and octopuses can also change colour.

Cuttlefish swim slowly by using the fins on the side of their body. They also suck water into a space in their body called the mantle. This space has the gills to get oxygen from the seawater. When there is danger they can move quickly by squirting water out of their mantle. This shoots them backwards. They can also squirt a cloud of ink into the water to hide in and confuse an attacker.

All of this group are hunters eating other animals. Cuttlefish swim at night finding fish to eat. They grab fish with their tentacles. The tentacles and arms have suckers that hold onto the struggling fish. They can eat the fish using their nine sharp teeth.

Calamari is the muscle that covers a squid's body. Squids breed very quickly and are not affected by fishing. To protect all these groups of animals we must make sure the sea remains clean and free from pollution.

Additional teacher notes

- This group of animals are called the cephalopods. They belong to a larger group of animals called the molluscs that include the shellfish, land snails and slugs. Over millions of years some animals like the octopus and slug have lost their shells.
- While there are about 800 species of living cephalopods, it is estimated that over the past 350 million years there have been thousands more species. Before fish, cephalopods were the largest predators in the sea. Many of their shells have been fossilised in the rocks.
- Their eyes work differently to ours. The eyes of backboned animals focus by changing the shape of the lens. Cephalopod eyes work like a camera lens, moving back and forth to focus.
- Chromatophores are special pigment cells in the skin of octopuses, cuttlefish and squid. These cells can spread or contract different colours or pigments very quickly changing the look of all or part of the animal. The colour can even be changed in waves up and down the bodies of some species.
- The blood chemistry of these animals uses copper. Our blood uses iron. Their blood is colourless until it is exposed to the air and then it turns blue-green.