

On the Hunt

An octopus doesn't usually catch divers, but it is a skilled hunter. Often it eats whatever it finds. Its favorite foods are scallops, crabs, and other shellfish.

When it sees a crab, it moves fast. Its arms spread like a net as it swoops down onto its prey. The octopus grips the crab with its suckers. Next, it pokes a hole in the crab's shell with its sharp tongue.

The octopus shoots saliva through the hole. The saliva paralyzes the crab. The octopus carries the crab into its den. There, it cracks the crab's shell using its beak. Lunch is ready.

Eat or Be Eaten

The octopus needs to hunt to eat. Yet it does not want to be hunted. If chased by a predator, the octopus can make a fast getaway. It draws water into its **mantle**, or body. The mantle is a bag. It holds the octopus's brain, three hearts, and other organs.

The octopus squirts water out of its mantle through a **siphon**, or tube. The jet of water pushes the octopus.

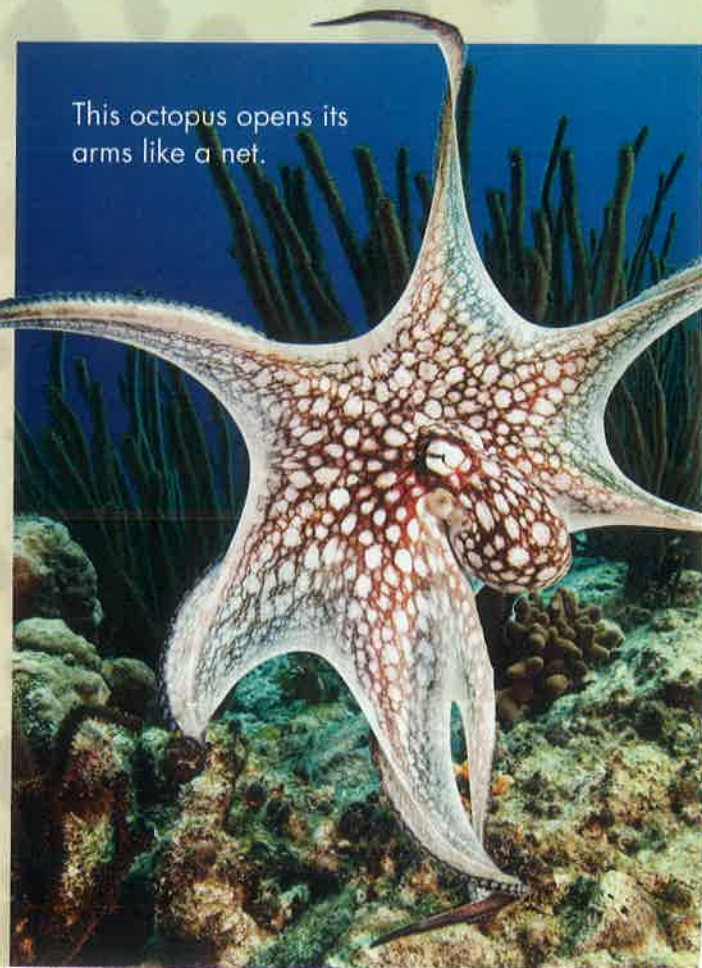
If a predator follows, the octopus might squirt out a cloud of black ink. A predator cannot see it escape.

Quick-Change Artists

The octopus has other survival tricks. Special color cells cover its skin. Each cell is like a balloon filled with paint.

The cells can stay small or get big. When they change in size, the octopus changes color. Its skin blends in with the colors around it. The octopus becomes hard to see. Predators swim past it.

An octopus also can make its skin bumpy to look like sand. The mimic octopus can even reshape its body. It can look like something a predator would never attack, like a sea snake. All these tricks can fool or frighten enemies away.



This octopus opens its arms like a net.



Changing color helps this octopus hide in corals.

Dodging Danger

Some octopuses have other ways to escape danger. One kind of octopus hides under the sand. Another kind has bright colors. Its colors are a warning. They say, "I am deadly!"

Most octopuses can shed their arms if a predator attacks. Each arm has a place where it can snap off. The broken arm keeps wiggling. That confuses the predator. Meanwhile, the rest of the octopus gets away. In six weeks, a new arm grows back.

Shields Up!

An octopus has no shell to protect itself. The tiny veined octopus carries protection with it. It searches the ocean floor for shells. When danger comes, it flips the shells up as shields. It hides behind them until it is safe to come out again.

Sometimes the only way for an octopus to stay safe is to get small. It might try squeezing into a space too small for predators.

That's easier than it sounds. An octopus can do this because it has no bones. It's an **invertebrate**. The beak is its hardest part. If the beak can fit into a little hole, the whole octopus will fit.

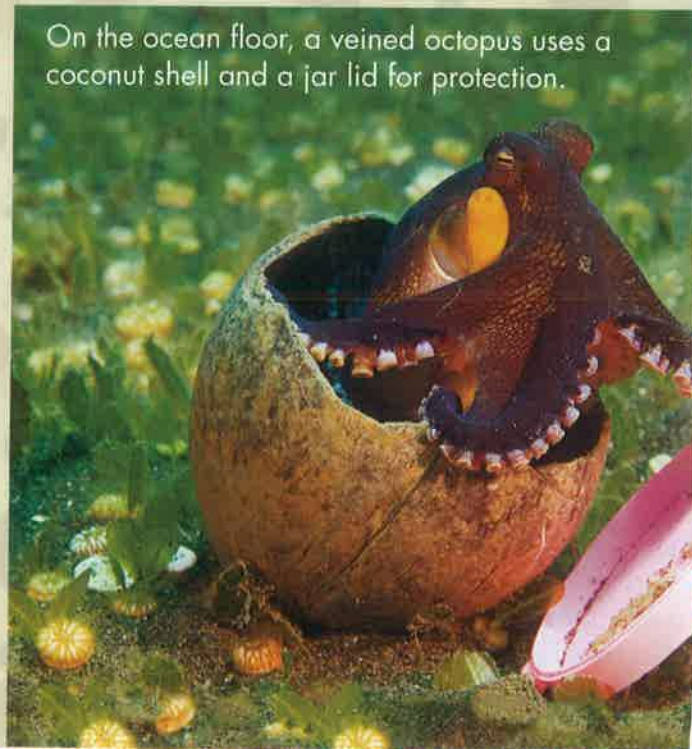
Seeing Is Believing

The glass octopus has many enemies. Yet it has an amazing survival trick. To stay safe, it can make its skin see-through. Its body organs are already too tiny to see. Predators look right through it.

The male blanket octopus uses a weapon against attackers. It rips stinging tentacles off a jellyfish. The tentacles don't bother the octopus, but they will hurt predators. The octopus whips them around like swords.

No wonder Cosgrove loves octopuses. They are so interesting. He remembers the first one he ever saw. He could not take his eyes off of it. He stayed in the ocean for hours until his oxygen tank ran out of air. That octopus changed his life.

On the ocean floor, a veined octopus uses a coconut shell and a jar lid for protection.





Wordwise

cephalopod: class of marine animals that have feet attached to their head

invertebrate: animal without a backbone

mantle: octopus body

siphon: tube through which an octopus blasts water out

The glass octopus's see-through skin makes it hard to spot.

Coming in May

Vanishing Cultures: Visit some amazing people. It may be your last chance before their way of life disappears.

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cover: A honey bee collects pollen from the flower of an apple tree.

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