

The Intelligence of Octopi

Octopi have the largest brains of all the animals without backbones.

They also have eyes as complex as those found in humans and are masters of camouflage, changing their colour and skin texture almost instantaneously, to blend in with their background.

Experiments conducted on an octopus named Frida at Munich Zoo have shown that octopi can be taught complex tasks, such as unscrewing a jam jar to get at the food inside, or even to work their way around mazes, the way a laboratory rat would.

Observations on the mating behaviour of octopi on a reef off Indonesia in recent years show that octopi engage in sophisticated courtship rituals including flirting, passionate hand holding and even keeping rivals away at arm's length.

The male octopus carefully selects a mate and then guards her den against all potential rivals until mating takes place, after which he lives for only a short time until the eggs hatch, and then he dies.

Ireland has its own native species called the "Curled Octopus", which are normally very shy and difficult to find in the wild. But you can see them on display in many of the excellent public aquaria around the country at Galway, Bray, Fenit or Dingle.



A Mind of its Own

Research conducted at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem shows that each arm of an octopus has, quite literally, "a mind of its own".

Each arm has its own intelligence, powered by some 50 million nerve bundles or "neurons" that allow it to perform complex movements set off by a simple command from the octopus's brain.

A severed octopus's arm was even made to move realistically on its own by tickling and stimulating the skin.



Captain Cackle's Log

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