

Sea Life & Camouflage

Animals that live in the sea face many dangers and one of the most dangerous is predators. Some animals use camouflage to protect themselves. This means that they have the ability to hide or blend in with their surroundings. An animal may be born with a particular colour or pattern and will therefore hide in an area that matches the colour of its own body. Others can change colour depending on the colour of their surroundings or if danger is near.

The octopus and squid can change their colours rapidly in order to sneak up on prey or to warn off predators. Many fish and animals are speckled so they can blend in with stones or sand without being seen and others are striped so they can hide in vegetation. Some animals even mimic or copy other animals or plants to hide from predators.

If a creature cannot change colour, it may 'decorate' itself with leaves or seaweed in order to hide. It may also allow another animal to live on it, for example a sea anemone living on a crab. The Sea Hare, changes colour according to what it is eating. If it eats green seaweeds it turns greenish in colour and changes to reddish in colour if it feeds on red seaweeds. This means Sea Hares will blend in with their surroundings as they eat.

Fish that live close to the sea floor are often dark in colour on the top side of their body, to match the dark sea bottom. This makes it harder for predators, such as birds and sharks, to see them from above. Fish that live closer to the surface are often lighter on the underside of their body to match the brightness coming from the sky. This makes them invisible to predators underneath.

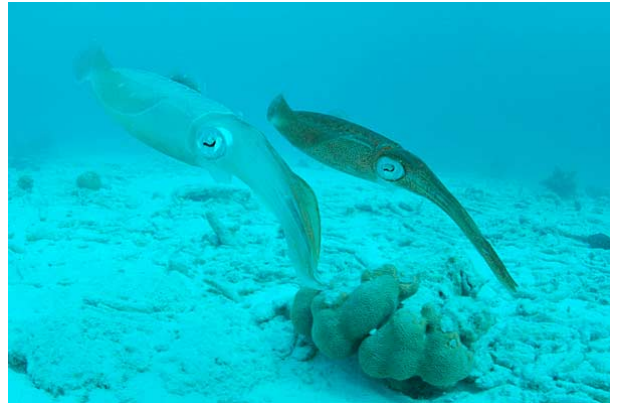


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Caribbean Reef Squid, showing how they can change colour to blend in with their surroundings.



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Fish blending with Fire Coral in Fiji.



Photo © Sherkin Island Marine Station

Flatfish are darker on top to match the surface of the seabed, making it harder for predators to see them.



Humans in Disguise

Unlike animals, humans don't have the ability to change the colour of their skin to suit their surroundings, however they use other means to blend into the background when necessary. People wear special coloured clothing to match their location: white when in the snow, black at night, browns and greens when in the forest. Humans also paint their faces and wear leaves and branches in order to blur the lines of their body. From a distance, it becomes much harder to pick out the human shape.