

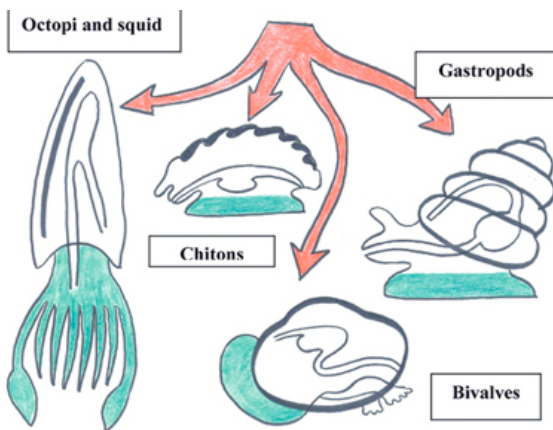
The Marvellous Molluscs

The molluscs are a very successful class of animal, with some 60,000 living species and at least 35,000 fossil species. They include slugs and snails on land and winkles, whelks, oysters, scallops, squid and octopi in the sea. Molluscs are invertebrates - which means that they have no skeleton or backbone. They do however have a single muscular foot which, in snails and slugs is used for sliding and gripping and in octopi and squid for far more complex tasks, including mating and catching prey. Of all the invertebrates, octopi and squid are the most intelligent, with brains capable of moving their eight arms, searching out prey, darting after it at high speed by "jet propulsion" or manipulating their skin colour and texture to blend in with their surroundings completely.



The Molluscs' Family Tree...

Biologists think that modern molluscs probably evolved from a simple worm-like creature into four distinct groups, each with a distinctive muscle (shown in green below left). These groups are the Chitons (or coat of mail shells), the Gastropods (stomach feet!) or snails, whelks and winkles, the Bivalves (two shells) including oysters, clams and scallops, and the most advanced group, the Cephalopods (head-feet) or octopi and squid.



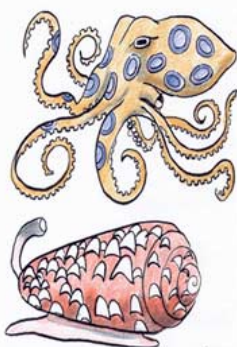
Eye - Eye ...

If you think that wearing glasses is a problem, spare a thought for the scallop, whose shell is lined with dozens of tiny simple "eyes". These are very useful for avoiding predators such as starfish, which scallops evade by snapping their shells and flapping off like a pair of flying false teeth!



Captain Cockle's Log

Welcome aboard shipmates!
Together, we'll be taking a look at the world's greatest natural resource - the sea!
Words & pictures by John Joyce
John Joyce 2005
For more adventures from Captain Cockle, visit his website at
www.captaincockle.com



Murderous Molluscs

The blue-ringed octopus is no bigger than a golf ball, but has poisonous saliva capable of killing a human being in minutes. The blue rings only glow when it is about to attack. Luckily for us in Ireland it is only found in Australia. Other deadly natives of tropical waters are the beautifully coloured cone shells. These marine snails prowl about coral reefs in search of small fish to eat. Their poison, which can be injected with harpoon-like teeth, acts on the nervous system to cause paralysis and even death.