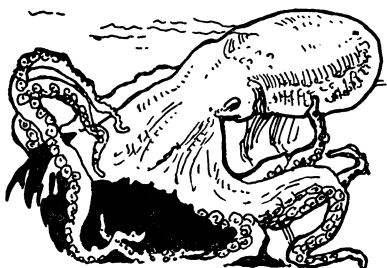


MARINE BIOLOGY  
**NATURE RAMBLINGS**



**Maligned Monster**

► WHEN A newspaper columnist of another generation wrote

"Though full of arms, the octopus  
Is never called an arsenal;

In fact, some names they call the cuss  
Won't do to put in print at all,"

he was (quite unintentionally, to be sure) maligning one of the shyest, most retiring of all the citizens of the sea.

True, the creature is often called "devil-fish"—a name much more appropriately claimed by the great horned manta, or giant ray—but there is nothing especially devilish about him. He hides in chinks between rocks or cavities in the coral, quite as much for his own safety as to enable him to nab such incautious lobsters, crabs and other items of sea-food as may venture within reach of his sucker-covered arms.

Menace to man the octopus certainly is not, at least so far as American coastal waters are concerned. Biggest specimens reported from our shores have an arm-

spread of six or eight feet—and no inclination to use it on anything so big as a human bather or diver. There have been reports of a giant octopus on the Australian coast, with a "reach" of 40 feet; such a species might very well be dangerous.

However, vacationers in our winter beach resorts need be on the lookout for only two really aggressive and dangerous sea creatures—the barracuda and the moray or sea-eel. They may safely ignore all but the very largest sharks—which are very rarely seen in our waters anyway—and they can forget all about the octopus.

Indeed, if anyone is entitled to present a bill of complaint on account of a tendency to seize and devour, it would be more appropriate for the octopus to prefer such charges against the human species. In the fish markets of the Mediterranean region and the Far East, small octopuses are common objects of sale, as are also their free-

swimming relatives, the squids. The peoples of those regions cook them in various ways; and even American and British naturalists who have tried them say they can be very tasty when properly prepared.

There is no logical reason why we shouldn't relish a dish of octopus or squid. Almost all of us like oysters and clams; abalones and mussels, too, when we can get them. Gourmets of Gallic taste delight in roasted snails. All these sea animals are mollusks, belonging to the same great zoological group as octopuses and squids. Indeed, they might even be called their poor relations, for these many-armed mollusks are considered by zoologists as the most advanced forms of their kinship.

So if we readily eat oysters, yet turn up our noses at a dish of octopus, we are behaving very much as we would if we were to accept fish but reject beefsteak.

Science News Letter, January 30, 1954

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