

Jellyfish (Sea Jellies)

Jellyfish are sea creatures that can be found in all oceans. They have existed for millions of years, even before dinosaurs. They are made up of a jello-like substance of water and protein that can be completely clear or it can be brightly colored. There are many different kinds of jellyfish. They can be as small as a pin or as large as a human.

Like the starfish that is properly called a sea star, jellyfish are properly called sea jellies because they are not actually fish. Jellyfish are considered plankton because they drift in the water instead of swimming. Although they can propel themselves up and down, they are pretty much at the mercy of the ocean currents. Blooms of jellyfish sometimes form where two currents meet. If there is an onshore breeze thousands of jellyfish can be beached.

Their body is called the crown. They don't have a head so they don't have a brain. They also don't have bones or a heart, so they have no blood. They have nerve endings in their tentacles that sense their surroundings and tell them what to do. These tentacles hang from the crown and help them to grab and eat plants, small fish and crabs. In aquariums they have even been known to eat peanut butter. Because some jellyfish are clear, you can actually see their stomach digesting the food.

Jellyfish use their tentacles to sting their prey. The sting paralyzes their prey so the jellyfish can eat. When a human comes into contact with the tentacles of a jellyfish it can be very painful or even deadly. But people still eat them! In Japan, jellyfish powder is used to make salted caramel. Other animals that eat jellyfish and jellyfish larvae are sunfish, sea turtles, birds, crabs, sharks and whales.

Most jellyfish live less than one year, and some of the smallest may live only a few days. In order to reproduce, males and female jellyfish release sperm and eggs into the water. If the two meet each other, larvae are formed which may lead to a new jellyfish. Or it may get eaten by an old jellyfish or other animal. It's a good thing jellyfish can clone themselves. If a jellyfish is cut in two, the pieces of the jellyfish can regenerate and create two new organisms.

One interesting thing about jellyfish is that some of them can glow in the dark. Many jellyfish have bioluminescent organs, which emit light. This light may help them in a number of different ways, like attracting prey or distracting predators. Scientists are studying this bioluminescence to see if it could be used to power medical devices in the future.

HOMEWORK

Is a jellyfish a fish? _____

What does a jellyfish eat? _____

Can a jellyfish hurt you? _____

Draw a picture of a jellyfish glowing in the dark.