

GEORGIA AQUARIUM ANIMAL FACT SHEET

Giant Squid

Architeuthis dux

Range/Habitat

- The giant squid is found worldwide in temperate seas over the continental shelf or island slopes. Specimens are rare in tropical and polar latitudes.
- This cephalopod is believed to inhabit open water depths from about 656 to 3280 feet (200-1000 m). Some scientists believe that it may be associated with the bottom rather than mid-water.

Physical Characteristics

- The giant squid is the largest living cephalopod with the possible exception of the colossal squid (see below).
- The largest giant squid ever recorded was about 55 feet (16.8 m) in total length (i.e., when measured from the tip of its tentacles to the end of its body).
- Current research indicates that few specimens exceed 42 feet (13 m) in total length. The body length of these individuals would be about 26 feet (8 m) with the two tentacles extending another 16 feet (5 m). A specimen of this length would weigh about 342 lbs. (155 kg).
- This cephalopod has eight arms and two longer tentacles attached to the head. The arms have two rows of suckers that have finely serrated saw-like rings of chitin, in contrast to those of the octopus which do not have such armament.
- The tips of the tentacles are broadened to form clubs, which are armed with hooks arrayed in four rows.
- Behind the head is the mantle that tapers sharply to a point.
- There are two small fins on either side of the tapered section of the mantle.
- The giant squid has the largest eyes of any animal and are described as the size of dinner plates.
- The mouth of the giant squid is equipped with a parrot-like beak for tearing apart its prey and a tongue-like radula covered with file-like teeth for shredding the chunks into sizes that can be swallowed.

Diet/Feeding

- The giant squid is believed to be a solitary hunter because only single specimens have been caught in fishing nets.
- It preys on deep sea fishes and other squid species, which it captures with its tentacles.

Conservation Status

- The giant squid is not included on the IUCN Red List.

Additional Information

- Scientists believe that the colossal squid (*Mesonychoteuthis hamiltoni*) may be larger than the giant squid. However, the description of this species is based on fewer than 20 specimens or large fragments found since 1925, so adult size of the colossal squid is undetermined.
- The large eyes of the giant squid allow it to see the bioluminescence emitted by its prey.
- It has only been observed alive in its natural habitat once, in December, 2006 in the western Pacific. Therefore, little is known about its behavior or interaction with other species.

- A female was found with more than 11 lbs. (5 kg) of eggs, which were estimated to number in excess of one million. Little more is known of the reproduction of the giant squid.
- The growth rate of the giant squid is believed to be extremely rapid because it reaches sexual maturity after about three years and has a life span estimated to be five years. This indicates that it must be a prodigious predator and occupy a zone in the ocean where prey are plentiful.
- Adult giant squid are preyed upon by sperm whales and sleeper sharks. Juveniles fall prey to deep sea sharks and fishes.

Sources

<http://marinebiology.org/species.asp?id=156>

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www.tonmo.com/science/public/giantsquidfacts.php

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