

JELLIES

SCIENTIFIC CLASSIFICATION

FAST FACTS

FUN FACTS

ECOLOGY & CONSERVATION

BIBLIOGRAPHY

MENU - A

SCIENTIFIC CLASSIFICATION

COMMON NAME:	Jellyfish, jellies
KINGDOM:	Animalia
PHYLUM:	Cnidaria
CLASS:	Scyphozoa
ORDER(S):	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stauromedusae• Coronatae• Semaestomae• Rhizostomae
GENUS SPECIES:	About 200 species

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

FAST FACTS

DESCRIPTION:	The shape of the bell of a jelly varies between species; they range from saucer shaped to a deep helmet shape. The bell is translucent and can have various pigments. Other coloration comes from the color of the stomachs and the gonads. Many species have 4 or 8 frilly oral arms which have cnidocytes (stinging cells) that aid in prey capture. Tentacles surrounding the bell can be short and fringelike or long. The mouth opens into a central stomach, which is composed of four gastric pouches.
SIZE:	2 to 40 cm (0.79–15.7 in.) in diameter; larger individuals, such as <i>Cyanea capillata</i> (lion's mane jellyfish), may be up to 2 m (6.56 ft.).
LOCOMOTION:	Jellies swim by contracting and relaxing their bells. Many jellies drift with currents rather than actively swim. Members of the order Stauromedusae are sessile.
DIET:	Small animals including plankton and crustaceans
FEEDING:	Prey is captured with tentacles or the oral arms. Some species are suspension feeders, trapping small plankton in their finely fringed tentacles.

REPRODUCTION:	Cnidarians have a sedentary polyp and a free-floating medusa phase. The medusa phase dominates the life cycle of jellyfishes. Jellyfishes have either male or female gametes (sex cells). Gametes are released in the open water where fertilization takes place. The fertilized egg will develop into a planula larva, which settles into the substrate to grow into a polyp (scyphistoma). The polyp either buds off new polyps or produces ephyrae (immature medusae) by strobilation. The ephyra grow into adult medusae.
RESPIRATION:	Gas exchange takes place through the body surfaces. Cnidarians do not have gills or gill-like structures.
LIFE SPAN:	Up to one year
RANGE:	All oceans worldwide; from cold to tropical waters; some freshwater species exist
HABITAT:	Deep or coastal waters

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

FUN FACTS

1. Around the bell, jellyfishes have eight pairs of eyespots that are sensitive to light. They also have eight statocysts that help maintain proper orientation while swimming.
2. Most jellyfishes are solitary animals. However, moon jellies travel in groups of hundreds to thousands of animals. The masses can cause many problems including clogged fishing nets and mass beachings, which can be harmful to beachgoers.
3. Jellies are about 95% water. Less than 5% of a jellyfish is organic matter.

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

ECOLOGY AND CONSERVATION

Humans swimming in tropical or temperate waters may unfortunately encounter jellyfishes. Jellies do not attack humans; swimmers are stung when they come into contact with the stinging tentacles of the jellies. Tentacles can trail far behind jellies or break off and brush against swimmers. Jellies can also wash up on the beach and are still capable of delivering a sting, even out of water. The severity of stings depends on the size of the tentacle, the type of jelly, and the thickness and sensitivity of the skin of the swimmer. When stung, the tentacles should immediately be removed from the swimmer's skin. As long as the tentacles are in contact with the skin, they will continue to fire nematocysts and continue stinging.

Jelly stings result in swelling, redness, itching and rash. The discomfort can last from minutes to several days. The area should be rinsed with salt water (fresh water can cause more nematocyst discharge and increase the discomfort). The most effective treatment is to use vinegar, followed by ibuprofen or acetaminophen for swelling and discomfort. More severe stings or wounds should be treated by a doctor.

Relatives of jellyfish, including box jellies, sea wasps, and Portuguese man-of-wars can produce more severe stings and more serious reactions. Medical attention should be sought

immediately if you believe you have been stung by one of these animals. There are usually warning signs posted at beaches where these animals are commonly seen.

[RETURN TO TOP](#)

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[RETURN TO TOP](#)

[RETURN TO PREVIOUS PAGE](#)