

Jellyfish

& their kin

All jellyfish are rather like bags of water and contain only feeding apparatus and reproductive organs. They have no brain, bones or blood. There is a rudimentary nervous system that can respond to light and heat. By expanding and contracting the bell, the true jellyfish may be able to make small movements and move up and down in the water in response to light and temperature. Their migrations are entirely controlled by wind and currents. Some jellyfish can live for two years or more, but after breeding at the end of the summer, most of the adults will die.

Moon jellyfish (*Aurelia aurita*)



This is the most commonly seen species and occurs mostly inshore in mid to late summer. It can grow up to 40cm (16") but is usually much smaller. Its tentacles are quite short and it is the frilly mouth arms that can be seen. The bell is usually clear or tinted white, with 4 blue or purple "moons" in the centre, which are actually reproductive organs. **Sting:** Very weak, but can cause itching and distinct reddening of the skin.

Compass jellyfish (*Chrysaora hysoscella*)



This species is usually solitary and grows up to 30cm (12") across. It is yellow-whitish in colour with distinctive brown v-shaped lines radiating from the centre, rather like an art-deco lamp. The edge of the dome is scalloped and fringed with 24 large tentacles. It has 4 long mouth arms which are wrinkled and hang from the centre of the underside. **Sting:** Harmless, but can cause a reaction on sensitive skin.

Blue jellyfish (*Cyanea lamarckii*)



This is quite a small jellyfish, usually about 15cm (6"), but can grow to 30cm (12"). The umbrella or bell shaped body is usually blue with a great many tentacles arranged in 8 groups around the lobed edges. The 4 mouth arms are large and frilly. Mostly common in the North Sea and not frequently found here. **Sting:** Can cause quite a nasty sting.

Lion's-mane jellyfish (*Cyanea capillata*)



This is the one of the largest jellyfish, reaching 2 metres (6ft) across, with up to 1000 long, stinging tentacles, but British specimens are no more than 50cm (17") wide. Its bell is smooth with "ragged" edges resembling a lion's mane. Large individuals are deep red to purple in colour, while smaller ones are more yellow or brown. **Sting:** Severe, reported to be like a wasp sting and can last for several hours, but frequently the sting is innocuous.

Public Information

Mauve Stinger jellyfish (*Pelagia noctiluca*)



Rarely found, but swarms are washed up about once a decade on the Cornish coast. It is an oceanic jellyfish that glows spectacularly in the dark. It grows to 9cm (4") across, but can reach 40cm (16") in northern waters. The deep bell is pinkish purple in colour and is speckled with wart-like spots that are actually stinging cells. It has 4 frilly arms and 8 trailing tentacles measuring up to 2 metres (6ft) long. **Sting:** This jellyfish has a potent sting.

Root-mouth jellyfish (*Rhizostoma octopus*)



Also known as the Sea-mushroom jellyfish, this is the largest commonly found species around our coast, reaching diameters of up to 1 metre (3ft). It is mainly pale yellow in colour (but may have a blue or pink tinge). It has 8 arms, each subdivided into numerous frilled mouths designed to rake in plankton. **Sting:** Harmless, but can cause a rash to sensitive skins.

Portuguese Man-o'-war (*Physalia physalis*)



Rarely found locally, this is not a jellyfish but a complex colony of polyps specialised for feeding, breeding and stinging. They grow under a bladder-like float which changes shape to catch the prevailing wind and measures a maximum of 12 x 4cm (5 x 1½"). The nearly invisible stinging tentacles can trail up to 10 metres (33ft) behind the float which is iridescent pale blue and pink, with a large, deflatable, pink-ridged crest above. **Sting:** Known to be fierce.

By-the-wind-sailor (*Velella velella*)



These are colonial animals related to the Portuguese Man-o'-war. They are often beached in thousands, when usually all that remains is the transparent, flat, horny float up to about 8 cm (3"), surmounted by an angled 'sail'. The living colony is blue; the float is fringed with tentacles, and underneath it, hang the colony of tiny polyps. **Sting:** None.

Jellyfish stings

In reality, most jellyfish stings are no more serious than a nettle sting for most people, yet it is best not to handle any of these creatures as sensitivity varies so much from person to person. Each jellyfish tentacle can house millions of stinging cells, which are automatically released when an object comes into contact. The stinging capsules of jellyfish still function even when separated from their owner and even dead jellyfish can still sting. Usually symptoms include a burning sensation, redness, and swelling of the lymph nodes.

If you are stung by a jellyfish:

- Alert the lifeguard on duty, who is trained in first aid and can call for assistance if necessary.
- Scrape off any tentacles.
- Rinse the wound with salt water.
- Vinegar helps neutralise the sting.
- Put an icebag onto the area to minimize pain.

The Coast and Countryside Service is concerned with encouraging an awareness of the natural environment and helping people find out more about it. This leaflet is one of a number concerning the marine environment. For further information please contact the Coast and Countryside Service on 01208 265644.