

MOLLUSCS

# Cephalopods

486 MYA – PRESENT

Domain	Eukaryota
Kingdom	Animalia
Phylum	Mollusca
Class	Cephalopoda

Cephalopods are a class in the phylum Mollusca and are familiar to most people as octopi, squid, cuttlefish, and nautiloids. They may have an external

shell, like nautiloids, an internal shell like a cuttlefish, or no shell, like squid. Cephalopods have a set of tentacles surrounding their mouth.

## Fossil Record

The oldest cephalopod fossils are found in rocks from the late Cambrian. They did not diversify much until the Ordovician when nautiloids (related to the modern nautilus) with conical shells up to 10 m long were the largest predators in the ocean. In the Mesozoic cephalopods diversified again, giving rise to ammonites (with coiled external shells) and belemnites (with a straight internal quill or 'guard'). These two groups became extinct at the end of the Cretaceous, 66 million years ago.

## Habitat and Lifestyle

Cephalopods are entirely marine animals, occupy almost all depths but are most diverse in tropical waters, however, some cephalopods also live near the poles. They have a relatively large brain and excellent vision, although most are colour blind. All cephalopods are predators.



Fossilised ammonite specimen on display in the Education Centre at Geoscience Australia. Image from James Cropper, Geoscience Australia.



Blue ringed octopus from the genus *Hapalochlaena*. Image from pen\_ash, pixabay.

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## ? DID YOU KNOW

The largest invertebrate alive today is a cephalopod.

It is the colossal squid which can reach up to 14 m in length, of which 4 m is the body and 10 m the tentacles. It also has the largest eyes of any animal; about 30 cm in diameter!

