

Blue-Ringed Octopus

Reports of people finding Blue-ringed Octopuses increased during December and January and four of these dangerous marine animals were found in Geographe Bay around Busselton.

Although widely distributed throughout Australia the octopus is more common in southern parts of the state during the warmer months.

Identification of the Blue-ringed Octopus is relatively easy. It is small in size, with the tentacles varying up to almost 4 inches in length. It is yellowish-brown in colour, has ringed markings on the tentacles and striations on the body. During feeding or when disturbed, the animal changes the colour of the rings and striations to a vivid blue.

Although the octopus is more deadly when fully-grown, the small one-inch specimens are extremely dangerous. Their poison is reported to be more potent than that of any land animal, including snakes.

This warning is not meant to discourage people from enjoying themselves at the beach, however as the Blue-ringed Octopus can be avoided easily, since it lives in rock pools, in clumps of seaweed and under rocks, etc. in deep water.

The octopus is mainly found by accident when people lift rocks out of pools or when fishermen use lures to catch other types of octopus for use as bait. Most bite cases happen when people have picked up the animal to examine it more closely.

The general safety rule, therefore, is to be a little more careful when near places where the octopus might be found. Also, any small octopus should be treated with extreme caution and never touched by hand.

In cases where small octopuses have been found and safely contained in a receptacle they should be delivered to any office of the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife or the Western Australian Museum for identification.