



Jellies: Seeing Through the Myths

Jellyfish are not actually fish.

Fish have bones, jellyfish do not. So jellyfish are not technically fish at all—which is why they are known today, as “Jellies!” All jellyfish are considered jellies, but not all jellies are jellyfish. “True” jellyfish have pulsing bells and stinging tentacles. Not all jellies have those attributes.

Jellies can be huge.

The world’s largest known jellyfish, the lion’s mane, can reach a bell diameter of 2.5 meters (8 feet) and its tentacles can grow to be about half the length of a football field (more than 120 feet).

Jellies are composed mostly of water.

60-70 percent of the human body is composed of water ... while jellies are composed of about 95 percent water. Jellies do not have hearts, brains, skeletal structures or circulatory systems.

Jellies are prehistoric creatures.

Recent evidence supports theories that the comb jelly may have been the first “true” animal in the evolutionary tree. Jellies have survived, relatively unchanged, for more than 650 million years—their ancestors swam the oceans long before sharks, the time of dinosaurs, the ice age and the arrival of humans.

Jellies are not good swimmers.

Some types of jellies use jet propulsion to quickly move through the water but they are relatively poor swimmers, at the mercy of tides and currents. Jellies were the earliest animals to swim the seas using muscles. “True” jellies contract muscles around the edge of their bodies, pushing water out of their hollow bell and propelling them through the water.

Urine does not cure a jelly sting.

Contrary to popular belief urine is not a proven cure for a jelly sting. Some experts recommend as a first treatment for stings. Other treatments can include meat tenderizer, baking soda, household ammonia and lemon or lime juice. Or, a barrier such as wetsuits or even pantyhose can prevent jelly stings.

Jellies are world travelers.

Jellies can unknowingly be transported out of their native ranges by attaching themselves to ship bottoms. Boat owners should rinse off boat bottoms before launching into new waters so organisms aren’t transferred from one ecosystem to another. A group of jellies is sometimes called a bloom, swarm or smack.