Care For Us

Octopus
Animal welfare refers to an animal’s state or feelings. An animal’s welfare state can be positive, neutral or negative.

An animal’s welfare has the potential to differ on a daily basis. When an animal’s needs - nutritional, behavioural, health and environmental - are met, they will have positive welfare.

A good life in captivity might be one where animals can consistently experience good welfare - throughout their entire life.
Understanding that animals have both sentient and cognitive abilities as well as pain perception, reinforces the need to provide appropriate husbandry for all captive animals, to ensure positive welfare.

In captivity, the welfare of an animal is dependent on the environment provided for them and the daily care and veterinary treatment they receive.

It is therefore very important we understand their behavioural and physiological needs, so we can meet those needs in captivity.
The octopus is a soft-bodied, eight-armed (or tentacle) mollusc of the order Octopoda. There are hundreds of species of octopus and the order is grouped within the class Cephalopoda, along with squids, cuttlefish and nautiloids.

They live in various regions within the ocean, including reefs, seabeds, intertidal zones and pelagic waters.

Octopuses have short life spans, but grow fast and mature early, reaching extremely large sizes, sometimes up to five meters long.
Octopus Like To Hide

Octopus are typically solitary creatures making their own dens out of various detritus from the sea floor. Octopus are fantastic at squeezing into small places due to their soft bodies. Octopus are also very good at camouflage and can disguise themselves by changing the colour and texture of their skin, something that helps them hide from potential predators.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Providing lots of hiding places for octopus is important, particularly if kept in a busy aquarium or tank. Rocks, sand, large shells, or artificial spaces such as jars or pipes are all interesting hiding places that they can use. Colourful aquariums that octopus can camouflage themselves in will also help. This will help alleviate possible stress and multiple hiding spaces will encourage choice and exploration of the enclosure.
Octopus are Intelligent

Octopus are the most intelligent of the invertebrate family and demonstrate advanced cognitive abilities. They have both long and short-term memories, as well as learning systems for both visual and tactile information. Their need to hunt and capture their food may be one of the reasons behind the development of their intelligence. Tool use is well known in some species, as well as cooperative hunting tactics. Some octopus have also demonstrated play behaviour.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Provide toys or objects that encourage manipulation and cognitive use. Children’s plastic toys that are moveable and require exploration can be used. Balls, bottles or anything that occupies the octopus’ interest through manipulation should be provided regularly, assessing when an octopus gets bored and adding new items for additional stimulation. Octopus can have very individual personalities and will respond differently to different enrichment, so always provide regular monitoring and make adaptations accordingly.
Octopus Like A Varied Diet

Many species of octopus like a varied diet. They will eat crustaceans (shrimp and crabs), but will also eat fish and some will use their beak to drill open shells such as molluscs - they will even eat other octopus.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage
Provide a varied diet and present the food in a manner that requires cognitive stimulation. Use items such as acrylic, see-through puzzle boxes with latches that must be undone to reach the treats placed inside them. Octopus can also undo screws, so screw bottles or jars can also be used to hide foods.
Octopus Naturally Hunt for their Food, sometimes cooperatively. Most species will pounce on their prey although the Pacific striped octopus has been known to 'trick' its prey by touching the far side of it with a stretched tentacle to encourage it to come closer. Octopus have also been observed coming out of the water in tidal pools to grab prey.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage
Where possible, encourage the natural hunting behaviours in octopus. Hide food around the aquarium, feed at different times and put food in puzzle feeders, jars or bottles. Plastic feeding balls with holes in filled with fish can be used, to encourage them to reach their tentacles in and retrieve food, enabling it to take time for them to eat all their food.
Octopus Are Sensitive But Strong

Octopus are sensitive to being touched, and are also incredibly strong relative to their size. Their hard beak can cause a lot of damage and they can also use their suckers to hold things with a very strong grip.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Keeper-octopus interactions can be positive if the handler is experienced in working with octopus and knows the animal’s individual behaviour. Care should always be taken to avoid injury to either the keeper or octopus- some octopus species are highly venomous and should not be handled.

Using bubbles or gentle splashes of water can provide positive stimulation and encourage octopus to engage in exploratory activities.
Octopus Can Escape

Octopus move by jet propulsion, as well as by using their tentacles to crawl along the bottom of surfaces. Possibly due to their inquisitive, exploratory nature and intelligence, they are apt at escaping in captivity, using their tentacles, suckers and soft bodies to easily climb and squeeze out of small spaces.

**Positive Behaviours to Encourage**

Providing an interesting environment that encourages repetitive exploration may reduce the need for an octopus to try and escape. Toys, complicated feeding strategies and positive keeper-octopus interactions will all help encourage positive, natural behaviours within the aquarium. Offer apparent opportunities to escape, like by putting a barrier across the aquarium with the top just protruding above the level of the water; with differing environments on either side, then the octopus can choose which side it wants to be.
Octopus Enjoy...

Cognitive challenges, food, toy manipulation and hiding. They are extremely intelligent and can get bored easily.

In captivity we should always try and replicate their natural and normal behaviours, so they are happy and healthy throughout their lives.