

Deception

For both predator and prey, an ability to blend into the background and deceive or confuse adversaries is paramount for survival.



The simplest way to lure your prey to within striking distance, or deceive your enemy and escape, is to use the reef itself. Many species bury themselves in sandy seabeds, leaving only their eyes and mouths exposed. The bobtail squid even has a coating of mucus to help grains of sand stick to its body. Others use camouflage. Stonefish are identical to stones, wobbegong and crocodilefish simply disappear against the sand, and ghostpipefish perfectly resemble seafans

and seagrass. Cuttlefish and octopuses can change the colour and texture of their skin depending on where they happen to be. The decorator crab prefers to get inventive with sponges and hydroids, employing them to cover its carapace. But deception is about more than camouflage. The stargazer has a worm-like appendage for bait, which wriggles inside its mouth. And like butterflies above the surface, some species use eyespots to trick predators

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into thinking they are larger than they are. However, the undisputed master of deception is the mimic octopus. Only recently discovered, this stunning animal uses its long arms and bold markings to resemble far more threatening creatures, such as seasnakes and lionfish.

