

Symbiosis

The clear-cut arrangements of predator and prey, producer and consumer, are not the only means of survival on the reef.



Intense competition for light, space and food has resulted in some unusual underwater partnerships. For tiny crustaceans, hydroids, and even fish, the body surface of a large animal is the perfect place to grow, feed, and mate. A hawkbill turtle ripping up coral in search of sponges exposes a bounty of food for angelfish and wrasse. A pearlfish seeks protection from predators by living inside a large seacucumber, although it offers its host nothing

in return. These one-sided partnerships are known as commensalism, with the host neither gaining nor losing. Mutually beneficial partnerships include the cleaner wrasse and shrimps that service the inhabitants of the reef by removing and eating dead skin and parasites. Sponges offer shelter for shrimps and crabs, kelps harbour colonies of snails, and hermit crabs carry anemones on their backs. Symbioses reach their peak with species that can't survive without

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one another. Anemonefish can only live in the arms of anemones. Coated with a protective mucus, the fish is immune to the anemone's stings, which protect both partners from predators. In return, the fish drives off butterflyfish that try to make a meal of the anemone.

