

Deadly in the water

Jellyfish can be beautiful to look at as they float gracefully in the sea. But most jellyfish have a painful sting, and one variety of jellyfish is considered the most dangerous living creature in the world. This creature, the sea wasp of Australia, also known as box jellyfish, can kill a large fish or even a human in minutes.

Sea wasps aren't the biggest jellyfish, but they can grow as large as a basketball. They have up to 60 long tentacles. The tentacles can dangle 15 feet down into the water and are loaded with thousands of stinging cells. When the sea wasp's tentacles brush up against an animal, chemicals on the animal's skin trigger the release of the sea wasp's venom. The venom affects the nerves and heart of the prey. Usually the sea wasp uses its venom on fish, which it then eats. But sometimes humans are unlucky enough to come into contact with a sea wasp's tentacles. These victims can suffer excruciating pain, nausea, breathing problems, and occasionally even death.



Australians have developed an antivenom to treat the sea wasp's stings. Like the antivenom used for poisonous snake bites, it counteracts the poison from the sting. But there is an easier, although very unusual way to avoid stings in the first place. Thin layers of nylon are used by Australian lifeguards to prevent sea wasps from touching people's skin. When this is worn it keeps the tentacles from releasing their venom.