

Feral February Episode 15 – All for one and one for all

Description

Throughout the month of February, which I am calling “Feral February,” I am going to do something a little bit different – I’m going to create a series of theme posts every week day about my favourite things in the world: Animals.

Today’s animal is the Portuguese man-of-war.

Jellyfish have an easily identifiable shape – large bell-shaped bodies with long tentacles hanging down that are used for feeding. But, like most animals, everything that looks similar may not always be.

Take the Portuguese man-of-war.



Portuguese man-of-war. Photo courtesy of Biusch. [Source](#).

Looks like a jellyfish, doesn’t it? But it isn’t. And, strictly speaking, it isn’t even one animal, but multiple.

The Portuguese man-of-war is a siphonophore, an animal made up of a colony of organisms working together. There are four separate groups of animals called polyps that make up the man-of-war: the gas-filled bladder at the top, the tentacles, the digestive organisms and the reproductive organisms. All four are so dependent on one another that, while separate animals, they cannot survive without each other.

Unlike jellyfish, the man-of-war cannot move itself, but relies on the wind and ocean currents to carry it across the tropical and temperate seas of the world. Its long and thin tentacles that trail underneath the bladder can extend up to 165 feet (50 meters), and used to paralyze and kill fish and other small creatures. Each tentacle is covered with numerous venom-filled nematocysts, like jellyfish and sea anemones, which are extremely painful, but rarely deadly. And if you find a dead man-of-war washed up on a beach, DO NOT TOUCH IT. Even dead ones can still sting.

Daily dose of trivia:

The man-of-war's name comes from the unique shape of the gas-filled bladder, which sits above the water like a sail, which resembles an old Portuguese warship at full sail. The bladder can also be deflated in the event of bad weather or other threats and submerge for a brief time.

Category

1. Feral February

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1. animals
2. Feral February
3. Portuguese man-of-war

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