# Octopus surge along English coast disrupts fisheries amid marine heatwave



This spring, an unusual phenomenon has gripped fishers and seafood lovers along the English coast: a remarkable surge in octopus populations, attributed to a marine heatwave that has seen sea temperatures rise by as much as 4°C above the seasonal average. The cephalopods, known for their alien-like appearance and intelligence, have become both a delightful surprise and a source of frustration for local fishers.

Reports from Brixham market in Devon indicate that catches of octopus began to rise dramatically in March, peaking at 36 tonnes in one day compared to a mere 200kg during the same period last year. Barry Young, managing director of Brixham Trawler Agents, noted that this unexpected bounty has offered a valuable financial boost to fishers, who are capitalising on the opportunistic influx while it lasts. He stated that many traditional bottom-dwelling species they typically target are being complemented by the new arrivals, with octopus proving popular among buyers.

The excitement is palpable in the coastal town, where even local culture is reflecting this newfound interest; a seasonal light display featuring an octopus has become a nightly spectacle, and cafes have embraced octopus-themed décor. However, not all fishers are singing the praises of this octopus boom. Fishermen specialising in crab and lobster have raised concerns, as the voracious appetite of the octopuses threatens to decimate local shellfish populations. They have reported significant declines in their catches, attributing this detrimental impact to octopuses entering traps meant for crabs and lobsters.

Steve Fallaize, a veteran fisherman from Guernsey, echoed these sentiments, sharing that his catch of shellfish has plummeted over the past seven months, directly linked to the encroaching octopus population. He identified the future of the fishing industry as uncertain and is bracing for challenges posed by this ecological shift.

Marine ecologists are studying the implications of this shift. Dr Marta Marcos from the Mediterranean Institute for Advanced Studies has stated that the frequency of marine heatwaves is increasing, with half of the sea warming observed since 2000 closely tied to human-induced climate change. These rising temperatures not only drive octopuses further north but also threaten existing marine life. Such events have been documented before, with scientists noting spikes in octopus sightings in the past, including in the 1900s, the 1950s, and briefly in 2022. This makes it clear that while octopuses may thrive temporarily under these warmer conditions, the overall disruption to marine ecosystems remains a pressing concern.

Ongoing research is vital to understand these trends fully, particularly given the current lack of fishing quotas for octopus in the UK. Local authorities are taking action to ensure sustainability as this phenomenon unfolds, with the Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority currently exploring measures to manage octopus captures responsibly.

As more fishers turn their attention to this new opportunity, it raises questions about the long-term sustainability of octopus populations and how best to support the needs of all sectors within the fishing industry. The rise of octopus in English waters is not just a boon for those catching them but also a vivid reminder of the delicate balance required to preserve marine health amid a changing climate.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/26/the-seabed-is-full-of-them-english-fishers-enjoy-surprise-octopus-boom> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c15zxe18q8ko> - In February 2025, Guernsey fishermen reported a significant decline in shellfish catches, attributing the downturn to a surge in octopus populations. Steve Fallaize, a commercial fisherman for over 30 years, noted a massive decline in shellfish over seven months, linking it to the increasing number of octopuses in the island's waters. He expressed concerns about the future of the fishing industry, stating he would be doing his 'best to survive' in the coming year and hoped to continue fishing despite the challenges posed by the octopus boom.
3. <https://www.falmouthpacket.co.uk/news/20248045.cornwall-huge-numbers-octopus-spotted-off-coast/> - In June 2022, Cornwall Wildlife Trust reported a significant increase in Common Octopus sightings along Cornwall's coastline, particularly around the Lizard peninsula. Divers and snorkellers observed multiple octopuses in a single dive, a rare occurrence in UK waters. Local fishers also reported large numbers of octopuses in their lobster pots and cuttlefish traps, with one Mevagissey fisherman catching 150 octopuses in a day, compared to his usual catch of one or two annually. This surge was described as a 'bumper year' for octopus sightings, last recorded along England's south coast over 70 years ago.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/nov/23/catastrophic-marine-heatwaves-are-killing-sealife-and-causing-mass-disruption-to-uk-fisheries> - In November 2024, The Guardian reported on the devastating effects of marine heatwaves on UK fisheries. The National Oceanography Centre (NOC) highlighted that rising sea temperatures were causing mass mortality of marine life, including shellfish colonies, and disrupting fisheries. The NOC called for urgent research to understand and mitigate the impacts of these heatwaves, which were becoming more frequent and intense due to climate change. The report emphasized the need to prepare for future events to protect marine ecosystems and the communities dependent on them.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jun/19/marine-heatwave-uk-irish-coasts-threat-oysters-fish-high-temperatures> - In June 2023, The Guardian reported on an unprecedented marine heatwave off the coasts of the UK and Ireland. Sea temperatures were several degrees above normal, posing a serious threat to marine life, including fish and oysters. The Met Office recorded higher temperatures in the North Sea and North Atlantic, with areas off the coast of England up to 5°C above usual. Scientists warned that sustained high temperatures could lead to mass mortality of marine species and called for increased monitoring and research to understand the long-term impacts of such heatwaves.
6. <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/research/news/2024/impact-of-marine-heatwaves-on-uk-weather> - In 2024, the Met Office published a study demonstrating how the summer 2023 marine heatwave was generated by exceptional atmospheric conditions and contributed to breaking UK land temperature records. The study highlighted that marine heatwaves (MHWs) are prolonged periods of anomalously warm sea surface temperatures, which can have strong ecological and socioeconomic impacts. The research emphasized the need to understand the drivers of MHWs and their impact on UK weather patterns, as well as the importance of monitoring and preparing for future events.
7. <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKCEFAS/bulletins/3b837e6> - In June 2023, the North West European shelf experienced unprecedented surface temperature anomalies of up to 5°C locally, and the longest-ever category II marine heatwave—16 days—was recorded. This event was detailed in an article led by Ségolène Berthou, Met Office, and published in Nature Communications Earth & Environment. The study explained how the marine heatwave unfolded and its feedback on regional weather conditions, highlighting the significant impact of such events on marine ecosystems and the importance of understanding their drivers.