# Surge in common octopus threatens crab and lobster stocks in British waters



Recent months have seen a remarkable surge in the population of common octopus in British waters, particularly along the southwest coast of England. Fishermen like Alan Steer, based in Devon, report striking changes in their daily catches, noting a staggering increase from virtually nothing to approximately 1,000 kilograms per day. The octopuses, weighing between 2.5 and 3.5 kilograms, have become not only prevalent but a lucrative catch, surpassing the market value of crabs, which historically dominated local fisheries.

However, the implications of this rapid influx are concerning for marine biodiversity. As fishers have observed, the octopus are voracious predators, significantly impacting local crab and lobster populations. Steer expressed alarm about the devastation observed, estimating his crab and lobster catches have diminished by around 70%. He showcased empty crab shells in his pots as evidence of this ecological imbalance.

This phenomenon is reminiscent of earlier population blooms recorded over a century ago. Previous spikes in octopus populations occurred in 1899, 1950, and again in 2022, but these events were typically short-lived, with octopuses retreating after cold winters. The current situation has prompted the Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IFCA) to initiate studies to assess the sustainability of the octopus fishery. Sarah Clark, deputy chief officer at the IFCA, highlighted the urgency of gathering data to understand the long-term implications for local marine ecosystems.

Scientists suggest that the current boom may be attributed to a combination of factors, including rising water temperatures due to a recent marine heatwave, which has seen temperature increases of approximately 2.3°C above average. This climate anomaly has not only fostered conditions favourable for octopus but has also been linked to an increase in other warm-water species like barrel jellyfish, seabass, and occasional sightings of dolphins in inshore waters. Dr Zoe Jacobs of the National Oceanography Centre stressed the necessity for enhanced monitoring of these species to determine whether the ongoing heatwave is indeed driving this influx of octopus into coastal regions.

Reports from Cornwall further illustrate this phenomenon, with divers and local fishermen noting record catches. Instances of individuals catching as many as 150 octopuses in a day starkly contrast with historical norms, where fishermen would typically net only one or two annually. This unexpected abundance evokes both excitement and trepidation within the fishing community; while the immediate financial rewards are welcome, the long-term consequences on marine life raise red flags.

Conservationists have begun to express concerns that the dramatic rise in octopus numbers could signal broader ecological shifts. The possibility that octopuses may increasingly replace traditional species like cod in British waters due to climate change has been discussed among researchers. As octopuses establish themselves in the marine environment, the implications for fish and shellfish populations could be profound, necessitating careful management and consideration of fishing strategies.

In summary, the current boom in octopus populations in British waters presents a complicated scenario. It is a unique situation that puts economic opportunities at odds with ecological stability, underscoring the need for informed and proactive management strategies to navigate these changes effectively.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25196103.octopus-boom-british-waters-concern-say-scientists/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/octopus-boom-uk-waters-first-27376204)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25196103.octopus-boom-british-waters-concern-say-scientists/?ref=rss), [[4]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c15zxe18q8ko)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25196103.octopus-boom-british-waters-concern-say-scientists/?ref=rss), [[5]](https://www.vice.com/en/article/octopus-may-replace-cod-in-british-waters-thanks-to-climate-change/), [[3]](https://www.the-independent.com/climate-change/news/octopus-sighting-cornwall-coast-fisherman-b2113581.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://www.euronews.com/green/2022/02/24/an-environmental-disaster-europe-will-soon-be-home-to-the-world-s-first-octopus-farm), [[5]](https://www.vice.com/en/article/octopus-may-replace-cod-in-british-waters-thanks-to-climate-change/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://www.the-independent.com/climate-change/news/octopus-sighting-cornwall-coast-fisherman-b2113581.html), [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/jul/01/population-explosion-octopus-boom-prompts-joy-and-concern-cornwall)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25196103.octopus-boom-british-waters-concern-say-scientists/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/octopus-boom-uk-waters-first-27376204> - Cornwall has reported a significant increase in Common Octopus sightings, with one fisherman catching 150 in a single day, compared to the usual one or two annually. This surge is considered a 'bumper year' for the species, with divers and snorkellers observing more octopuses, particularly around the Lizard Peninsula. The last such population boom along England's south coast was over 70 years ago. ([mirror.co.uk](https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/octopus-boom-uk-waters-first-27376204?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.the-independent.com/climate-change/news/octopus-sighting-cornwall-coast-fisherman-b2113581.html> - Fishermen, divers, and snorkelers off Cornwall's south coast have reported a spike in Common Octopus numbers, prompting conservationists to suggest a rare population boom. One Mevagissey fisherman caught 150 in a day, compared to his usual one or two annually. The last significant boom in England was in 1948. ([the-independent.com](https://www.the-independent.com/climate-change/news/octopus-sighting-cornwall-coast-fisherman-b2113581.html?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c15zxe18q8ko> - A Guernsey fisherman reports that an explosion in the island's octopus population is decimating the local lobster, crab, and shellfish catch. Steve Fallaize, with over 30 years of experience, notes a massive decline in shellfish over seven months, attributing it to the abundance of octopuses. He expresses concern about the future of his fishing business. ([bbc.co.uk](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c15zxe18q8ko?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/octopus-may-replace-cod-in-british-waters-thanks-to-climate-change/> - Researchers suggest that octopuses may replace cod in British waters due to climate change. The last decade has seen a dramatic increase in warm-water species like squid, octopus, and Atlantic bluefin tuna around the UK. This shift could have significant impacts on fish and shellfish populations. ([vice.com](https://www.vice.com/en/article/octopus-may-replace-cod-in-british-waters-thanks-to-climate-change/?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.euronews.com/green/2022/02/24/an-environmental-disaster-europe-will-soon-be-home-to-the-world-s-first-octopus-farm> - Scientists criticise plans for the world's first octopus farm in Europe, arguing it could be an environmental disaster. Octopus farming is seen as counterproductive to environmental sustainability, as octopuses are carnivorous and require fishmeal, exacerbating the depletion of wild fish stocks. ([euronews.com](https://www.euronews.com/green/2022/02/24/an-environmental-disaster-europe-will-soon-be-home-to-the-world-s-first-octopus-farm?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/jul/01/population-explosion-octopus-boom-prompts-joy-and-concern-cornwall> - Unprecedented numbers of octopuses have been reported in Cornwall, leading to both celebration and concern. Fishermen have observed significant increases in catches, while conservationists view the boom as a positive sign. The last such event along England's south coast was more than 70 years ago. ([theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/jul/01/population-explosion-octopus-boom-prompts-joy-and-concern-cornwall?utm_source=openai))