# Hungry Mediterranean octopuses invade British waters, devastating crab fisheries amid rising sea temperatures



An invasion of hungry octopuses from the Mediterranean is wreaking havoc on crab fisheries in British waters, leaving fishermen and restaurants scrambling to adapt. The surge in octopus numbers is believed to be linked to unusually warm sea temperatures—around 2.5°C higher than usual—which has lured these cephalopods northward in unprecedented numbers. Wholesalers have reported substantial cuts in restaurant orders, a situation that is troubling for chefs striving to maintain their menus amidst dwindling supplies.

Brian Tapper, a fisherman from Plymouth, expressed his frustration at the invasion, stating, “The octopuses are ruining us. They're coming in the side hatch – it's like McDonald's for them.” These creatures have cleverly exploited the small escape hatches designed for juvenile crabs and lobsters, using them to access fishermen's pots and consume bountiful amounts of shellfish before fishermen arrive to check their traps. Barry Young, from Brixham Trawler Agents, confirmed the disturbing trend, stating that the decimation of the crab fishery is serious, although there is a silver lining for boats targeting octopuses, with over 27,000kg landed in a single morning.

The implications of this octopus influx extend beyond simple inconvenience for fishermen. Andrew Hartle, manager of The Winking Prawn restaurant in Salcombe, noted that his crab orders had been reduced by 25%. He described the situation as critical, particularly for restaurants relying on a single supplier. The Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (D&SIFCA) acknowledges the challenges faced by the fishing industry and is evaluating whether to ease the current regulations on pot designs, which may inadvertently be facilitating the octopus raids.

The trend isn't localised to the UK. A fisherman from Guernsey reported a notable downturn in lobster and crab catches attributed to the burgeoning octopus presence. Similar reports are emerging from Brittany, France, where local fishermen are experiencing substantial losses due to the predation of their traps by octopuses. These incidents underscore a larger issue tied to climate change, as milder winters in recent years have fostered ideal breeding conditions for octopuses, leading to population explosions that threaten local marine ecosystems and the livelihoods of those dependent on fisheries.

Historically, periods of octopus population booms have caused significant disruptions. Accounts from as far back as 1899 describe similar increases off the south coast of England resulting in severe impacts on crab and lobster fisheries. This historical precedent offers a stark warning of the potential long-term consequences for marine ecosystems if current trends continue.

Despite these challenges, some fishmongers are attempting to shift the narrative by promoting octopus as a culinary delicacy, introducing recipes that highlight its versatility, such as the popular 'Amoricaine' style. Yet the pressing economic challenges faced by fishermen may dampen these attempts to cultivate demand.

Experts have raised concerns that this increase in octopus population is representative of broader changes in marine species distribution due to climate change, suggesting that warm-water species like octopuses may increasingly replace traditional cold-water species like cod in British waters. This shift can create ripple effects across the marine food web and impact the sustainability of fisheries in the region.

As local fishermen continue to grapple with the challenges posed by these cephalopod invaders, the fishing industry remains at a crossroads. How they adapt to this new reality—balancing traditional practices with the need for innovation and sustainability—will be crucial for the future of seafood in Britain and beyond. The ongoing situation highlights the complex interplay of environmental change and economic livelihoods, calling for comprehensive solutions to ensure both marine biodiversity and the resilience of fishing communities.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14746887/octopuses-Mediterranean-devour-shellfish.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c15zxe18q8ko)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14746887/octopuses-Mediterranean-devour-shellfish.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.connexionfrance.com/news/octopus-invasion-threatens-lobster-and-livelihoods-in-brittany/435185), [[4]](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-the-marine-biological-association-of-the-united-kingdom/article/abs/plague-of-octopus-on-the-south-coast-and-its-effect-on-the-crab-and-lobster-fisheries/6BB14F90DB1F5D1F4E172B78CE109456)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.thetimesjersey.com/post/octopuses-causing-significant-damage-experts-warn), [[6]](https://www.vice.com/en/article/octopus-may-replace-cod-in-british-waters-thanks-to-climate-change/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-the-marine-biological-association-of-the-united-kingdom/article/abs/plague-of-octopus-on-the-south-coast-and-its-effect-on-the-crab-and-lobster-fisheries/6BB14F90DB1F5D1F4E172B78CE109456), [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/jul/01/population-explosion-octopus-boom-prompts-joy-and-concern-cornwall)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://www.connexionfrance.com/news/octopus-invasion-threatens-lobster-and-livelihoods-in-brittany/435185)
* Paragraph 6 – [[6]](https://www.vice.com/en/article/octopus-may-replace-cod-in-british-waters-thanks-to-climate-change/), [[5]](https://www.thetimesjersey.com/post/octopuses-causing-significant-damage-experts-warn)
* Paragraph 7 – [[2]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c15zxe18q8ko)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14746887/octopuses-Mediterranean-devour-shellfish.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c15zxe18q8ko> - A Guernsey fisherman reports that an explosion in the island's octopus population is leading to a significant decline in local lobster, crab, and shellfish catches. The situation has become so precarious that he is uncertain about the future of his fishing activities. The first half of 2024 yielded successful catches, but from July onwards, the fishing industry experienced a sharp downturn, with earnings plummeting over the past seven months. The fisherman attributes this decline to the increasing number of octopuses in the waters. ([bbc.co.uk](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c15zxe18q8ko?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.connexionfrance.com/news/octopus-invasion-threatens-lobster-and-livelihoods-in-brittany/435185> - In Brittany, France, an unprecedented increase in octopus numbers is threatening local lobster and shellfish industries. Fishermen report that octopuses are consuming lobsters and crabs directly from traps, leading to significant financial losses. The surge in octopus population is attributed to climate change, with milder winter temperatures facilitating their proliferation. Despite the challenges, some fishmongers are attempting to boost demand for octopus by promoting its culinary uses, such as preparing it in 'Amoricaine' style. ([connexionfrance.com](https://www.connexionfrance.com/news/octopus-invasion-threatens-lobster-and-livelihoods-in-brittany/435185?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-the-marine-biological-association-of-the-united-kingdom/article/abs/plague-of-octopus-on-the-south-coast-and-its-effect-on-the-crab-and-lobster-fisheries/6BB14F90DB1F5D1F4E172B78CE109456> - A historical account from 1899 describes a significant increase in octopus populations off the south coast of England, leading to substantial predation on crabs and lobsters. Fishermen reported unusual occurrences, such as finding large numbers of crabs and lobsters in traps, indicating a severe impact on local fisheries. This event highlights the potential for octopus population booms to disrupt marine ecosystems and fisheries. ([cambridge.org](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-the-marine-biological-association-of-the-united-kingdom/article/abs/plague-of-octopus-on-the-south-coast-and-its-effect-on-the-crab-and-lobster-fisheries/6BB14F90DB1F5D1F4E172B78CE109456?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.thetimesjersey.com/post/octopuses-causing-significant-damage-experts-warn> - Experts warn that the rising presence of octopuses in local waters is significantly affecting the shellfish industry in both Jersey and Guernsey. The increase in octopus numbers has led to extensive damage to local catches, including lobsters, crabs, and scallops. Despite hopes that colder weather might push the octopuses back to warmer waters, they have remained a persistent problem, exacerbating the challenges faced by local fishermen. ([thetimesjersey.com](https://www.thetimesjersey.com/post/octopuses-causing-significant-damage-experts-warn?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/octopus-may-replace-cod-in-british-waters-thanks-to-climate-change/> - Research indicates that climate change is causing a shift in marine species distribution around the UK, with warm-water species like octopus becoming more prevalent. This change could have significant impacts on the marine ecosystem, potentially leading to the replacement of cold-water species like cod. The increase in octopus populations may also affect local fisheries and the broader food web. ([vice.com](https://www.vice.com/en/article/octopus-may-replace-cod-in-british-waters-thanks-to-climate-change/?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/jul/01/population-explosion-octopus-boom-prompts-joy-and-concern-cornwall> - In Cornwall, UK, an unprecedented increase in octopus sightings has been reported, leading to both excitement and concern. While conservationists celebrate the resurgence of octopus populations, local fishermen express worries about the potential impact on their livelihoods. The surge in octopus numbers has been described as a 'population explosion,' raising questions about the balance of marine ecosystems and the future of local fisheries. ([theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/jul/01/population-explosion-octopus-boom-prompts-joy-and-concern-cornwall?utm_source=openai))