# Unprecedented octopus surge boosts Cornwall and Devon fishers amid warming seas



This spring, an unusual phenomenon has captivated the fishing communities of Cornwall and Devon, where a significant surge in octopus numbers has been observed, driven by an unprecedented marine heatwave. With sea temperatures rising between 2 to 4 degrees Celsius above the typical spring averages, fishers have celebrated this unexpected bounty, particularly at Brixham market, where daily catches now reach tens of tonnes.

Barry Young, managing director of Brixham Trawler Agents, reported that the market recently saw an influx of 36 tonnes of octopus in a single day, a staggering contrast to the mere 200 kilograms caught this time last year. "It’s a financial bonus for the fishermen," he noted, highlighting how the bottom-dwelling octopus has complemented their usual hauls of plaice and sole. The absence of quotas on octopus also means that these lucrative catches are directly benefiting the fishers, with prices soaring to £8 per kilogram at auction.

However, while octopus fever has swept the area—with local cafés adopting octopus-themed decorations and the town’s octopus light even being turned on nightly—this surge is not without its drawbacks. The very fishing methods that have brought prosperity to some have caused distress to others, particularly those specialising in crab and lobster. Reports indicate that octopuses have been entering pots intended for shellfish, preying on them and leading to a notable decline in local shellfish stocks. Young noted that “some boats have seen a dramatic drop off in crab and lobster,” showcasing the tensions that have arisen within the fishing community.

Marine biologists suggest that these changes in octopus distribution can be attributed to broader patterns of climate change. Studies show that half of the sea warming recorded since 2000 would likely not have occurred without human-induced climate change. As Dr Marta Marcos from the Mediterranean Institute for Advanced Studies explains, the increasing frequency of marine heatwaves poses significant risks, not just to octopuses but to marine ecosystems as a whole.

Experts indicate that this fluctuation in marine life is not unprecedented. Historically, there have been similar surges in octopus populations during the 1900s, the 1950s, and briefly in 2022, leading researchers to question the underlying causes. Carli Cocciardi, a marine nature recovery officer at Devon Wildlife Trust, suggested that while warmer waters are a principal factor, changes in prey availability and ocean currents could also play vital roles.

Despite the bounty, there is a pressing need for sustainable management as octopus populations surge in English waters. Cocciardi affirmed, “We’re just going to have to keep an eye on it,” referring to the importance of monitoring this new phenomenon for long-term ecological impacts. The Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority is already considering solutions to balance octopus fishing with the needs of other marine life, showing a proactive approach to evolving environmental challenges.

Amidst these discussions, the broader implications of rising ocean temperatures further complicate the picture. Research from the University of Adelaide has indicated that while octopus populations may be thriving now, alterations in their environment—particularly elevated temperatures—could impair critical biological functions, such as vision, impacting their long-term viability.

As communities like Brixham enjoy the immediate economic benefits of this unexpected octopus boom, the interconnectedness of ocean life can remind us of the delicate balance that is often disrupted only to reveal the more profound consequences of our changing climate. The shifting dynamics within the fishing industry highlight the necessity for adaptive management strategies that consider the vulnerabilities and opportunities created by climate change, ensuring that such a sudden influx of marine life does not further complicate the intricate fabric of marine ecosystems.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/26/the-seabed-is-full-of-them-english-fishers-enjoy-surprise-octopus-boom), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/26/the-seabed-is-full-of-them-english-fishers-enjoy-surprise-octopus-boom)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/26/the-seabed-is-full-of-them-english-fishers-enjoy-surprise-octopus-boom), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/26/the-seabed-is-full-of-them-english-fishers-enjoy-surprise-octopus-boom)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/nov/23/catastrophic-marine-heatwaves-are-killing-sealife-and-causing-mass-disruption-to-uk-fisheries), [[5]](https://www.mba.ac.uk/record-breaking-marine-heatwaves-caused-global-devastation-in-the-last-two-years/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://www.asianscientist.com/2016/06/in-the-lab/oceans-climate-change-cephalopod-population-increase/), [[7]](https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2024/04/240405130454.htm)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/26/the-seabed-is-full-of-them-english-fishers-enjoy-surprise-octopus-boom), [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/26/the-seabed-is-full-of-them-english-fishers-enjoy-surprise-octopus-boom)

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## 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.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/26/the-seabed-is-full-of-them-english-fishers-enjoy-surprise-octopus-boom> - An unprecedented marine heatwave has led to a surge in octopus numbers in English waters, particularly in Cornwall and Devon, where sea temperatures have risen by 2°C to 4°C above average. This increase has been a boon for fishers, with Brixham market trading tens of tonnes of octopus daily. However, the boom has also caused tensions, as octopuses are entering crab and lobster pots, leading to a decline in shellfish catches. Marine biologists attribute the surge to climate change-induced warming, with concerns about the long-term impact on marine ecosystems.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/apr/10/octopus-eyesight-loss-ocean-temperatures-global-heating> - A study by Australian researchers found that rising ocean temperatures could impair octopus vision, potentially affecting their survival. Exposure to higher temperatures led to reduced levels of proteins essential for vision, suggesting that global warming may simultaneously impact multiple generations of octopuses. This research highlights the broader implications of climate change on marine life, emphasizing the need for further studies to understand and mitigate these effects.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/nov/23/catastrophic-marine-heatwaves-are-killing-sealife-and-causing-mass-disruption-to-uk-fisheries> - Marine heatwaves, intensified by climate change, have caused significant disruptions to UK fisheries, leading to the mass mortality of marine life and the closure of fisheries and aquaculture industries. The National Oceanography Centre has called for urgent research to understand and mitigate the effects of these heatwaves, which have been linked to widespread damage, including the bleaching of coral reefs and the spread of harmful algal blooms.
5. <https://www.mba.ac.uk/record-breaking-marine-heatwaves-caused-global-devastation-in-the-last-two-years/> - A study by the Marine Biological Association revealed that the summers of 2023 and 2024 experienced nearly 3.5 times as many marine heatwave days compared to any previous year on record. This surge, driven by climate change and El Niño, led to multiple record-breaking heatwaves causing widespread disruptions, including the closure of fisheries and aquaculture industries, and the mass mortality of marine life.
6. <https://www.asianscientist.com/2016/06/in-the-lab/oceans-climate-change-cephalopod-population-increase/> - A University of Adelaide study found that cephalopod populations, including octopuses, have increased over the past 60 years, possibly due to their ability to adapt to changing environmental conditions. The study suggests that cephalopods' unique biological traits, such as rapid growth and flexible development, allow them to benefit from a changing ocean environment, contrasting with declining populations of many fish species.
7. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2024/04/240405130454.htm> - Research from the University of Adelaide indicates that while climate change has led to an increase in octopus abundance, projected ocean warming could impair their vision, affecting their survival. The study found that thermal stress significantly reduced levels of proteins essential for vision, suggesting that octopus vision is likely to be impaired under future ocean warming conditions.