



GÅMSON (octopus) *Octopus cyanea*

Gåmson, as the octopus is called in Chamorro, is a mollusk. It belongs to a large group which includes clams, snails, and other animals popularly known as "shells." It belongs to the cephalopod class, which includes squids, cuttlefishes (both called ngosngos in Chamorro) and nautiluses. Cephalopods are among the most intelligent of marine animals. They have well-developed eyes and a beak-like mouth surrounded by tentacles with many suction cups.

The gåmson usually crawls slowly around the ocean floor. If startled however, it can use a strong blast of water to jet itself to safety. With the exception of nautiluses, cephalopods are able to squirt a cloud of ink which helps them to escape from predators. All local cephalopods are edible.

The gåmson has eight arms and a distinct sac-like head which contains all the animal's organs. There are at least five kinds of gåmson in Guam's waters, but only one, (*Octopus cyanea*), is commonly seen or caught. One species can reach a large size, at least 43 pounds (19.5 kg) and more than 7 feet long (2.1 m) from the tips of its tentacles to the end of its head. Other species however, rarely weigh more than five pounds (2.3 kg).

Two smaller species, the white spotted octopus (*Octopus macropus*) and web foot octopus (*Octopus membranaceus*) come into the open primarily at night. The two small species have been photographed or collected in shallow reef waters.

The gåmson feeds mainly on crabs and shrimps which are paralyzed by a venom as they are bitten. The beak is then used to puncture holes in the shells and pick out the flesh. It also feeds on other mollusks and fishes. The gåmson is a highly-prized food item and is routinely speared by fishermen.