

YZC Animal of the Month, August 2011 Greater Argonaut (*Argonauta argo*)



The fragile, papery shell is an egg case, and so is only seen in females. It is laid down by two of the octopus' arms that are webbed.

The animal often swims around with this webbing covering the shell. It contains special cells called chromatophores that can change colour from silver to dark maroon too.

In the upper gallery of the museum, round past the skeleton of the Permian beastie *Eryops*, beneath the skeleton of the Pygmy Right Whale, and near the collection of beautiful, colourful shells are the delicate shells of Argonauts, also known as Paper Nautilus.

Argonauts are a type of cephalopod mollusc. This is the group of very intelligent animals that includes octopus and squid. Despite being called a Paper Nautilus by some (and Nautilus is a type of cephalopod mollusc), Argonauts are actually a type of Octopus.

Argonauts are pelagic animals - that means that they live in the water column rather than on the ocean floor. These animals are often found at depths of less than 100m, and they have an open ocean lifestyle. They live in tropical and subtropical oceans, never in freshwater. They are carnivores, feeding largely on sea butterflies and small fish. They themselves can be prey to large fish such as tuna, and sea birds.