

# THE MAGICAL MIMIC

> THERE ARE MOMENTS WHEN YOU WITNESS A WONDER; YOU MAY NOT KNOW THE FULL POTENTIAL BUT YOU CAN STILL FEEL THE WONDER UNFOLD. IN MY CASE IT WAS THE FOLDING AND UNFOLDING OF GRACEFUL TENTACLES. THE TENTACLES OF THE MIMIC OCTOPUS.



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This is a unique cephalopod. It's nature's 'shapeshifter'. The mimic uses trickery to void off potential predators by copying the movements and appearance of poisonous sea creatures. It will impersonate lionfish, sole fish, crabs, sea anemones, and many other sea creatures to avoid being attacked.

First identified in 1998 off one of the larger Sunda Islands known as Sulawesi; and is believed to inhabit the bays of Indonesia, Malaysia, New Caledonia, and Papua New Guinea. The water temperatures in the known habitats of the mimic octopus are similar to the temperatures of northern Queensland, and the rich abundance of prey that the Great Barrier Reef complex provides makes it an ideal place for this species to thrive, although it had not been recorded there.

While exploring the waters around Lizard Island, I had the privilege of experiencing the first encounter with a mimic octopus in Australian waters. Deciding to go on a snorkel around mid day, I took a trek down to the Lagoon bringing my fins and camera hoping to hit the shallow reefs that surround the island. My goal was to take some pictures of the diverse fish, vibrant coral,

and the glorious colour schemes that giant clams display underwater. Before reaching the reefs I swam over the sandy lagoon; the water was clear and warm. There were stingrays cruising across the bottom, joined by the odd nudibranch making it's way across the sand. A couple more fin kicks and suddenly there was an octopus peering out the top of a sand burrow. What luck – an octopus out on the sand; with the great visibility it was the perfect opportunity for some photos. This moment sent me into awe over this species. The mimic started to put on the most incredible show, shifting from one pose to another, tentacles disappearing and reappearing from underneath to form new shapes. It was a real thrill to just sit and watch such an amazing event, and all the incredible strange movements that I was witnessing.

While observing this incredible creature I was able to witness the octopus mimicking the stingray. By bringing all of its tentacles excluding one around the base of itself to give the appearance of the stingray body shape, and the lone tentacle placed straight out resembling the stingray's tail. After several minutes it changed itself to look like a starfish placing four of its tentacles into the burrow it was on and the other four stretched out like a starfish. As I dove down to take a closer look; the octopus realised that its starfish appearance did not deter my curiosity. So it pulled two

more of its tentacles down into the sand burrow leaving two outstretched opposing one another giving the impression of a banded sea snake, (this defense is commonly used when the mimic octopus is being attacked by damselfish). It was the show of a lifetime!!!

Already so excited about seeing an octopus, I was ecstatic to learn of its origin and the significance of the sighting. Fortunately when I went to develop the pictures I had taken, the shopkeeper was able to tell me all about the octopus that I had digitally captured. The staff at Wet Rez Cameras shared in my enthusiasm to know the Mimic Octopus is out in Australian waters.

Initiating contact with researcher Dr. Mark Norman the Head of Sciences of the Victoria Museum in Melbourne, confirmed the species as the Mimic Octopus and that my viewing is the first ever recorded sighting of this wonderful creature in Australian waters.

*Main: Imitating a banded sea snake. Left to right: What a great pose, no idea what it's mimicking though; Mimicking a starfish; Mimicking a stingray.*

