Marine Homes Beach Program

The word “home” is one that everyone knows. We all have some place that we can call home, but these places can look very different from one another. A house can be a home, which can be made out of different things and be different shapes and sizes (some homes are made with wood and nails while some are made from brick and mortar, and some houses are big while others are small). Sometimes a home can be a place or a person, like friends and family. A home, no matter what it looks like, is a place where we feel safe.

Humans aren't the only species that needs a home; animals need to feel safe and have protection too. An animal’s home is going to be **something they have or create that protects them and helps them survive.** An animal’s home is probably going to look a lot different than the place that we call home. It’s going to depend on what they need to survive. For example, a turtle’s shell could be called its home. This is because turtles need their shell to protect them from predators.

Marine Animals

The word “marine” means “sea”, so a marine animal is an animal that lives in the ocean. These animals need to protect themselves too, and have adapted their behavior over time to survive. Listed below are some creatures in the Delaware Bay that have adapted their behaviors to protect themselves.

Spider Crab

The spider crab lives on the bottom of the Delaware Bay and scavenges for food. This means that it will eat the dead things that it comes across, rather than hunt live animals. This crab will decorate itself with some of the things it finds on the bay floor as it walks along it.

Common Octopus

The common octopus is a very smart marine animal. They are fast and can hide from their predators in plain sight by blending in with their surroundings. They also have ink that they can release to distract and confuse a predator if they get too close. This octopus can be found all over the world and eats things like crabs and mollusks.

Tautog

The tautog is species of fish that tends to live in large groups with other tautogs near shipwrecks, reefs, and docks. This species only eats during the day and has very strong teeth that it uses to eat a variety of species of shellfish. Tautogs can live up to 34 years!

Summer Flounder

The summer flounder is an easy fish to identify; its body is flat and rounded, with various spots on the top side of its body. This fish is a bottom feeder, eating things like shrimp, worms, and crustaceans. Flounder can also hide from predators on the bottom of the bay by digging into the sand.

American Eel

The American eel is another fish that is easy to identify, it almost looks like a snake. This species is more active at night, and usually hides from predators in the mud during the day. Eels are interesting because they will live in freshwater and reproduce in saltwater. Most species only live in one or the other.

After learning about these animals and their behaviors, print and cut out the images provided below and take them with you to the beach. Follow the instructions for finding the right kind of home for each species!

1. **Choose a species that would camouflage itself for protection.** *Find something on the beach that your marine species can blend in with!*

   Answer: Common octopus. The common octopus uses a special kind of **camouflage** to hide from predators. When an animal camouflages itself, it blends in with the things around it. This octopus has learned how to change the color of its skin to match its surroundings, like a chameleon! This allows the octopus to hide in plain sight.

2. **Choose a species that would dig a hole and hide in it for protection.** *Dig a hole and help your species hide from its predators!*

   Answer: American eel. The American eel has learned to protect itself by **digging a hole and hiding deep in the sand or mud**. These eels travel far during their mating season, and bigger fish and birds like gulls and osprey will try to eat them. Hiding in the sand prevents other animals from being able to see them.

3. **Choose a species that would bury itself in the sand for protection.** *Dig a wide, shallow hole, place your species in it and cover it almost entirely with sand!*

   Answer: Summer flounder. The summer flounder protects itself by **burying gently in the sand and blending in**. This fish is very flat and can blend in well with the sand. This is a good example of a fish using both its body and its behavior to hide from predators.

4. **Choose a species that would attach other objects to itself for protection.** *Find some small rocks, shells, seaweed, etc. to attach to your species.*

   Answer: Spider Crab. The spider crab is an example of a decorator crab that lives in the Delaware Bay. Decorator crabs use what's around them for protection by attaching objects to themselves. Decorator crabs will **attach things like rocks, shells, and seaweed to their shells** so that they can blend in with their surroundings.

5. **Choose a species that would hide under structures like docks, rock piles and reefs.** *Build a small structure out of materials on the beach for your species to hide under!*

   Answer: Tautog. The tautog likes to live by or underneath structures. They will **find areas that have a lot of vegetation or have manmade structures to protect them**. Tautogs will live by fishing piers, sunken ships, and manmade reefs. This keeps them hidden from the bigger fish that might try to eat them.

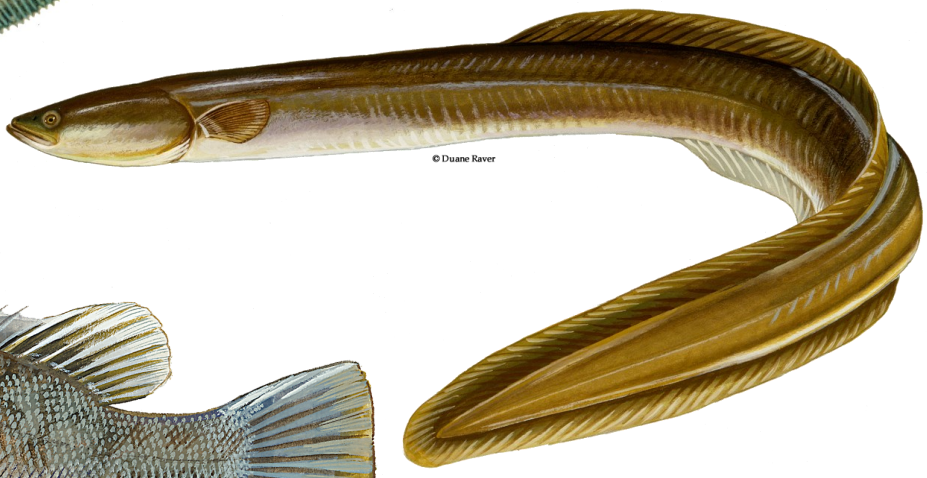
Find us on Facebook

Spider Crab

Common Octopus

Summer Flounder

American Eel



Tautog