The Giant Pacific Octopus

The Giant Pacific octopus is a member of the cephalopod family. In Greek, cephalopod means "head feet", which describes the octopus perfectly! An octopus's head is called the mantle, and its feet are tentacles, covered with two rows of suckers.   Octopuses have a beak for a mouth, three hearts, and two eyes which are used to hunt prey. Puget Sound is famous for the Giant Pacific octopus, which can be as large as 20 feet across!

Giant Pacific octopuses are the biggest in the ocean. Most of them can weigh up to 150 pounds, and their arms can measure 20 feet from tip to tip. Their bodies are squishy, with the beak as the only hard part. They can squeeze their bodies into very small spaces and through small holes the size of a lemon. Anything that their beaks can fit through, their bodies can as well. Have you seen Gertie, the octopus living in the Pacific Seas aquarium at Point Defiance Zoo?

Gertie is named after the Galloping Gertie bridge that fell into the narrows during a windstorm in 1940. Beneath the two bridges which replaced Galloping Gertie, Giant Pacific Octopuses have found a home among the wreckage. Since they like to hide in small spaces, octopuses are very happy underneath the narrows bridge.

Octopuses are carnivores. They like to eat clams, oysters, fish, crabs, and even squid. Using their arms and suckers, they grab and hold their food. If they eat a fish, they could paralyze it first with poisonous spit! They eat a lot, too, about 2 – 4% of their body weight in a day. This means that a 150-pound octopus might eat about six pounds of food each day! Because they take their food inside their den, divers often see crab and clam shells littering the outside of an octopus's cave.

Octopuses are smart. They can change color and texture when they want to hide. They also can escape their aquarium tanks if the keepers aren't careful! They can unscrew jars to find a treat hidden inside by their keepers. Curious and intelligent, octopuses are a favorite animal of aquarium visitors!