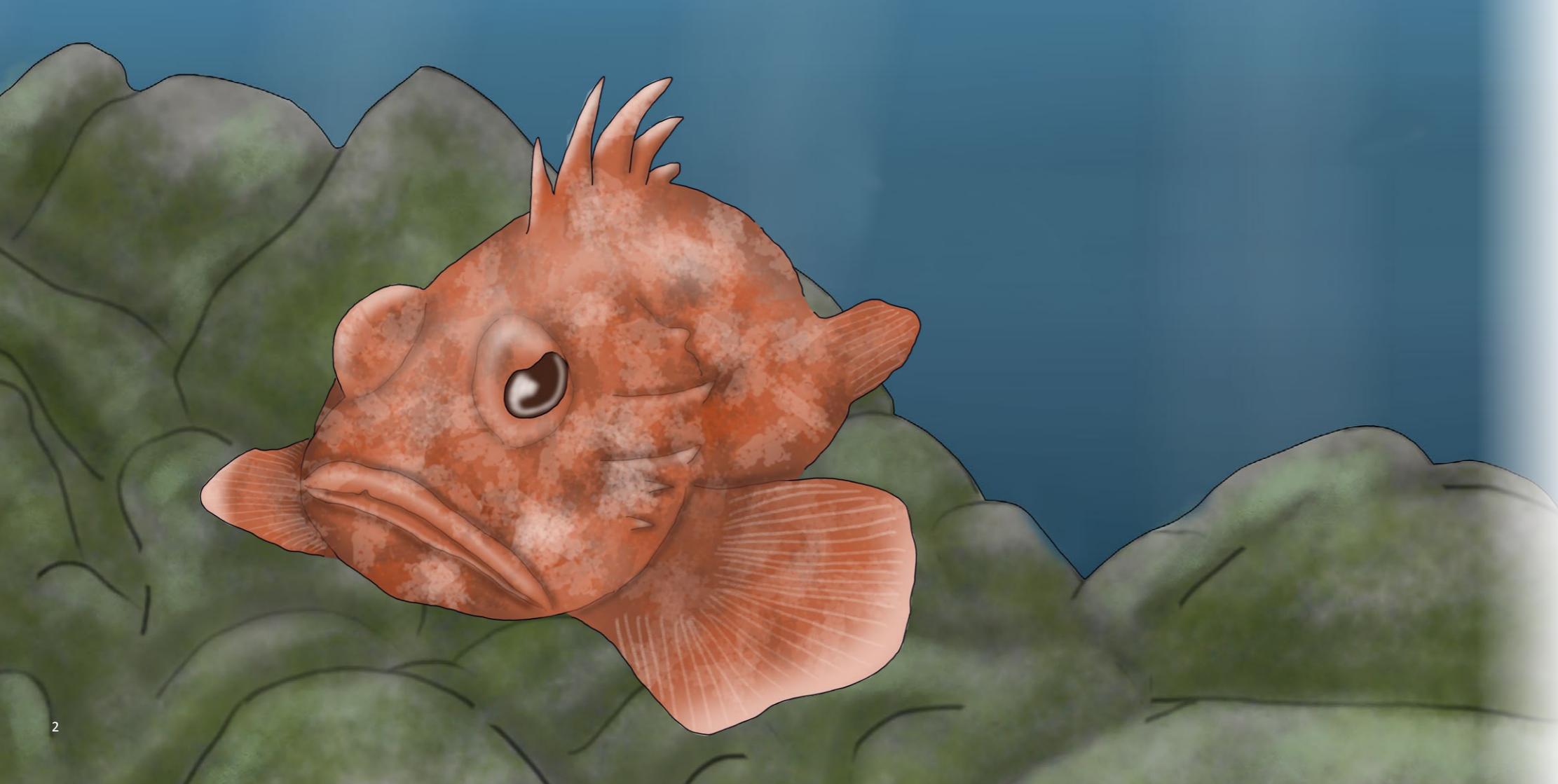


MARINE PREDATORS: MORAY EELS, CONGER EELS, SCORPIONFISH AND OCTOPUSES





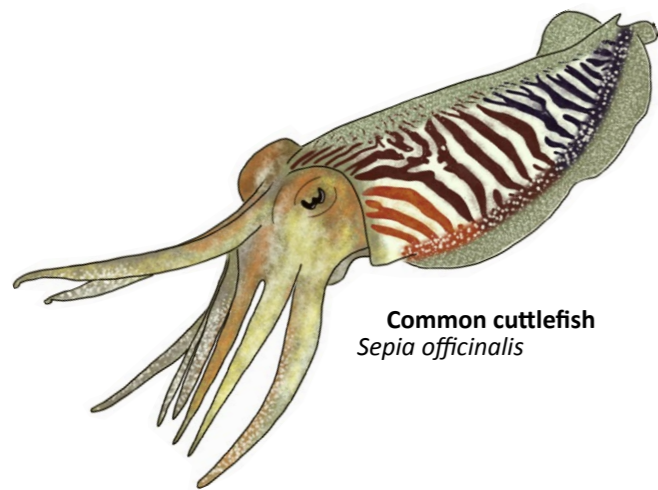
MARINE PREDATORS: MORAY EELS, CONGER EELS, SCORPIONFISH AND OCTOPUSES

Under the sea everything seems to move in slow motion, with the characters each placed strategically in their positions, until, in a fraction of a second, a fast and abrupt movement indicates that there has been a moment of action, often because of the surprise attack of a predator.

MARINE PREDATORS

Many of the species we see in the sea are predators, given that only a few of them that are herbivores and most of them feed on small invertebrates or plankton, which technically speaking makes them predators.

However, there are species that have specialised in the capture of other fish and molluscs. These are the hunters which we commonly understand as predators.



Common cuttlefish
Sepia officinalis

This large category includes everything from cuttlefish to the great tunas, sword fish, barracudas and lots of fish that live in the open sea, but the easiest to see for divers are the territorial ones, the ones which live hidden in holes and cracks and come out to hunt, usually in an evening ambush.

These are the moray eels, conger eels, scorpionfish and octopuses, and not forgetting the groupers, which we have dedicated a complete chapter to.



AMBUSH HUNTERS

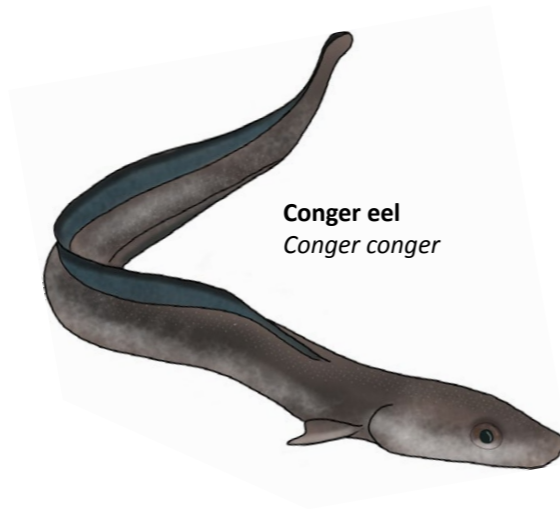
The **moray eels** and **conger eels** are of the same family, they have a similar elongated appearance with no scales, and a jaw with powerful teeth; however, they are easily distinguished due to the colour and the characteristic shape of the moray eel's head.

They live in the same habitat, they have even been seen sharing dens, and they are both great night hunters, which lay in wait to ambush their prey.

Both eels have a threatening appearance, especially the moray eel, which rests in the den with an open mouth to be able to breathe, but they are not aggressive towards divers.



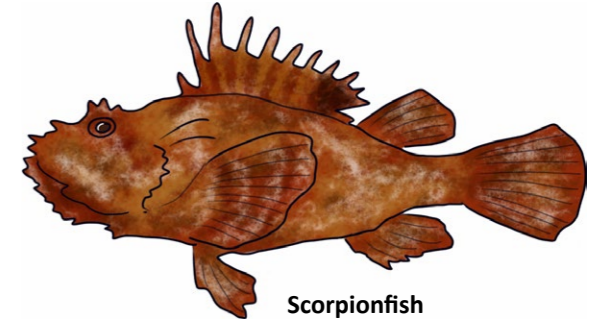
Moray eel
Muraena helena



Conger eel
Conger conger

Scorpionfish are masters of camouflage, surrounded by small tentacles, protuberances and defensive spines that protect them from their predators and at the same time they help them to go unnoticed. They measure about 40 centimetres in length, and although we find them on the coral seabed at a depth of at least 20 metres, they can live in very deep waters of up to 200 or 300 metres.

They live on the seabed, and they propel themselves with their fins with a fast movement over short-distances.



Scorpionfish
Scorpaena sp.

White-spotted octopus
Callistoctopus macropus



Unlike the species mentioned above, **octopuses** can hunt by launching ambushes and explore holes and cracks in search for their prey. Its eight powerful arms with suckers enable it to also hunt crustaceans and bivalves by breaking their shells.

They change colour with ease to go unnoticed in all types of seabeds and moray and conger eels are two of their predators.



DID YOU KNOW THAT:

- Little study has been conducted on many of these predators and the details of their reproduction are unknown. In some cases the spawning period is known but mating behaviours have not been observed.
- It is known that the conger eel reproduces when it reaches a certain size, about 2 metres long, which it reaches at about 15 years' old, it then produces a single spawn going on to decalcify and die.
- In the case of moray eels, mating behaviour has not been observed and newly spawned elvers have not been sighted either.
- Scorpionfish shed their skin every few weeks and emit one of the most painful poisons for humans. The venom remains active long after death, which is why we must always handle them with great care.
- They are all also scavengers, and they don't mind feeding on the remains of dead animals, whatever the cause of their death may be.

WHERE TO SEE THEM

We will see moray and conger eels in the coralligenous walls, hidden in crevices, holes and small cavities in the rocks, from depths of 20 metres or more. There aren't large numbers, but they are well distributed, and it is possible to see them throughout the entire Costa Brava. Their territorial nature makes it easier for diving centre guides to know where the dens are.

Octopuses can be seen in a greater variety of environments, especially on rocky bottoms, but also amongst posidonia and occasionally on sandy bottoms and at various depths.

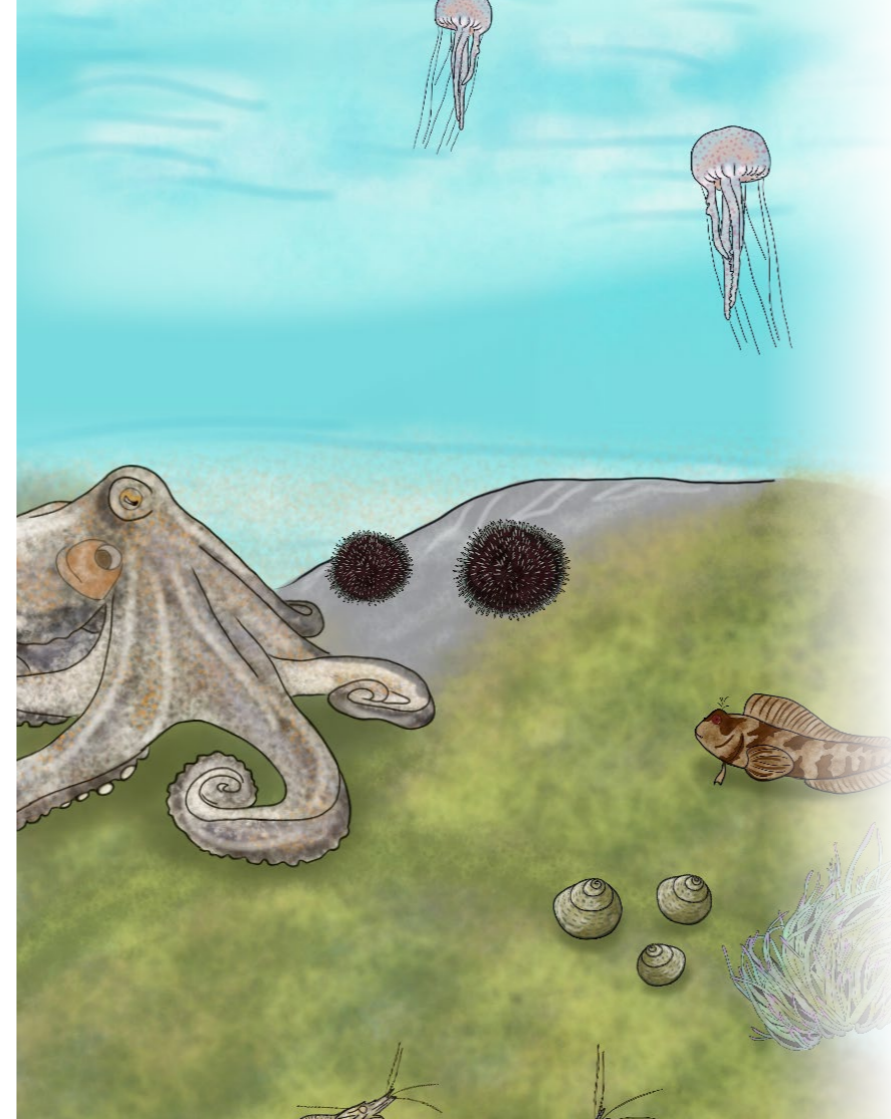
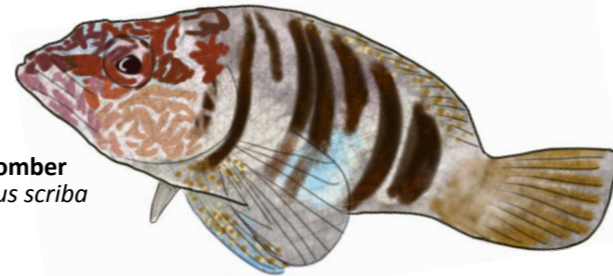
The red scorpionfish rests on the seabed, camouflaging itself amongst the organisms on the rocks and the seabed. As in the case of octopuses, we also find it in different environments, such as amongst posidonia.

HOW TO SEE THEM

Seeing these predators requires a careful observation of all the nooks and crannies and small cavities, as they are experts in camouflage and often remain motionless.

It is difficult to see them in action and we will have greater possibilities in night dives, although it will also be possible to see octopuses and scorpionfish during the day. If we are lucky enough to see them hunting we must consider ourselves fortunate, since even expert divers have seen very few, as they are mere glimpses.

Painted comber
Serranus scriba



PRECAUTIONS

In addition to diving in a way that we don't frighten them and conducting ourselves as expected, we must remember some of the basic practices of respectful diving, in this case not only for the sustainability of the dive but also for our own safety.

Moray and conger eels do not attack; however, they may bite if they feel threatened or if we try to feed them, and a scorpionfish can severely injure us with their poisonous spines if we make them flee suddenly.



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