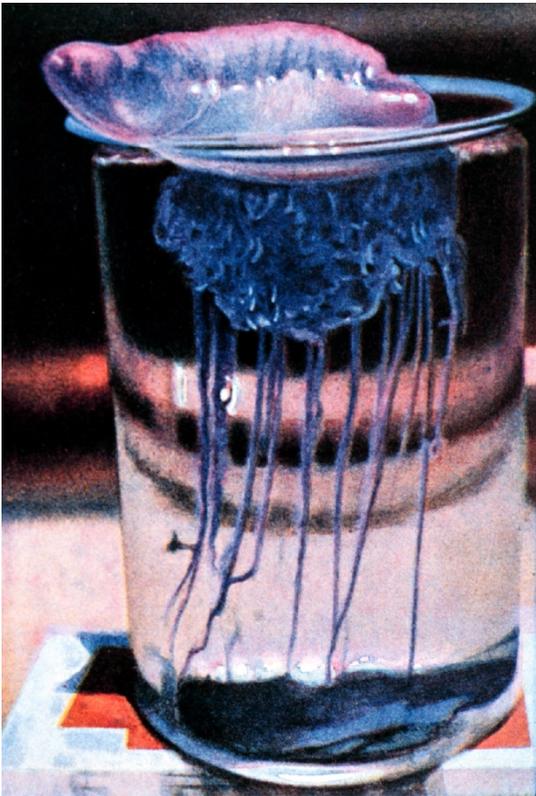


Portuguese Man-of- War



NOAA photograph by Sean Linehan. NOS. NGS

PHYSALIE

(Cliché autochrome de l'auteur)

The Portuguese man-of-war is a siphonophore (hydrozoan, not a true jellyfish), an animal made up of a colony of organisms working together. The man-of-war has four separate polyps (bladder, tentacles, digestive and reproductive). It gets its name from the uppermost polyp, a gas-filled bladder, which sits above the water and somewhat resembles an old warship at full sail.

WHERE ARE THEY FOUND?

Man-of-wars are found floating in warm waters throughout the world's oceans. They are primarily found in tropical and subtropical oceans, but strays can be found up the Eastern Atlantic coast as far north as the Bay of Fundy (Canada). They drift on the currents or use their bladder to 'sail' with the wind.

HOW BIG DO THEY GET?

Their bladder or float can be up to 12 in (30 cm) long and 5 in (12.7 cm) wide; the tentacles can be very long, but average length is 30 ft. They are covered in venom-filled nematocysts used to paralyze and kill fish and other small creatures. For humans, a man-of-war sting is excruciatingly painful, but rarely deadly. But beware—even dead man-of-wars washed up on shore can deliver a sting.

IF THEY WASH UP ONTO THE BEACH HOW DO WE REMOVE THEM?

Do not touch the Portuguese man-of-war with your bare skin. Use a shovel to pick up and discard in the trash. Be sure to get all of the tentacles off of the beach. Try to remove as much of the sand as possible that was in contact with the organism.

WHY ARE THEY IN NY WATERS THIS YEAR?

Sightings of the Portuguese man-of-war is unusual, and there have not been any sightings in the past several years. They are most likely stray individuals that were blown into shore from the Gulf Stream, a warm water current that comes up from the Gulf of Mexico and carries fish and other animals north along the coast. New Jersey first experienced sightings last week due to north and northeast winds, which pushed them towards shore. Since then, the winds have shifted south and southwest which have apparently carried them to Long Island.

WHAT CAN WE EXPECT THIS SUMMER?

The number of tropical species that we see in our waters, especially those that use the currents and winds, will depend on wind direction and duration.

THE STING

The sting of the Portuguese man-of-war is caused by the release of neurotoxins from stinging cells on the animal's tentacles called cnidocytes. Stings can be caused when a person makes contact with the tentacles and consequently with the cnidocytes. The inflammatory response resulting from stings is due to the release of histamines from mast cells within the person's skin. The result is often a lashlike welt, swelling, and/or rash-like response in the immediate area of contact. Pain is the most immediate result of contact with the man-of-war.

IF YOU ARE STUNG:

- If stung, report to a lifeguard, and seek first aid as needed. If symptoms are severe, seek immediate medical treatment.
- Avoid further contact with the Portuguese man-of-war and carefully remove remnants of the tentacles from your skin; do not touch them directly with fingers or any other part of the skin to avoid secondary stinging, use latex gloves or other protective hand wear if possible.
- Rinse with sea water.
- Remaining tentacles should be scraped off.

For more information, visit:

U.S. National Institute of Health, National Library of Medicine – NIH/NLM (2015). Jellyfish stings

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/002845.htm>