

Did a Cuttlefish Write This?

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Captive cuttlefish require entertainment when they eat. Dinner and a show — if they can't get live prey, then they need some dancing from a dead shrimp on a stick in their tank.

When the food looks alive, the little cephalopods, which look like iridescent footballs with eight short arms and two tentacles, are more likely to eat it. Because a person standing before them has to jiggle it, the animals start to recognize that mealtime and a looming human-shaped outline go together.

As soon as a person walks into the room, “they all swim to the front of the tank saying, give me food!” said Trevor Wardill, a biologist at the University of Minnesota who studies cuttlefish vision.

You may get a squirt of water from a cuttlefish's siphon if you don't feed them, though. Alexandra Schnell, a comparative psychologist at the University of Cambridge, recalled some who sprayed her if she was even a little slow with the treats. It's the kind of behavior that researchers who've worked with cuttlefish sometimes remark on: The critters have character.

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