



Encyclopedia of Life

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## Giant Squid

*Architeuthis*

How do you get two dead Giant Squid the size of a school bus from a fishing boat in Spain to a museum in Washington, DC, USA?

### Transcript

**Ari:** This might seem like a crazy question. But if you go to the National Museum of Natural History in DC, you'll see two dead giant squid. And they actually did come from Spain. There's a 13-foot male hanging vertically in one tank and a 24-foot female floating horizontally in another. How do you move such huge creatures that live thousands of feet underwater ocean into tanks in Washington, DC? Here's Elizabeth Musteen – a project manager at the museum. Her story starts in Spain in 2006 when the two squid came up in fishing nets, already dead.

**Musteen:** Giant squids live deep in the water, and they only come up if they're dead. And so it was a female giant squid and the male had come up earlier. And the female was what we were really interested in because they're much bigger than the male giant squids.

**Ari:** Wow, so, so you get the call that you've got squid in Spain.

**Musteen:** So we immediately start working with the 3M Corporation to figure out how we're going to display these giant squids.

**Ari:** That's the same 3M corporation that makes Scotch tape and post-it notes and a whole lotta other things, including – apparently – fluids for preserving and displaying dead squid. For months, Musteen worked not only with 3M, but with a team of exhibit designers and exhibit fabricators. They'd worked out every last detail for displaying these cephalopods, except for one. A big one. How to get the squid from Spain to the museum.

**Musteen:** That was my last big problem and I just kept putting it off. Then someone suggested maybe the Navy would be interested in moving a giant squid. And so I called the Navy. We said, "We need to move a giant squid." And there was silence. And they laughed, and then they said, "You know, let us work on it. We'll call you back." And so within about two

weeks, the Navy had a plan to move it and send it to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base because they're the ones who actually fly the planes.

**Ari:** Wait, wait: you were dealing with the Navy.

**Musteen:** We were dealing with the Navy, but the Air Force is the one who actually flies the cargo planes in and out of the base. So we were dealing with the Navy and the Air Force.

**Ari:** Okay, so you weren't shipping this thing across on a boat. You were...

**Musteen:** We were putting it on an airplane. So I hesitantly said to the sergeant at Wright-Patterson that it weighed a thousand pounds, which is a lot for us. And he said, "Ma'am, I move tanks for a living." So a thousand pounds wasn't much for him.

**Ari:** Was he kind of, like, jokey about it or was he, like, this is business?

**Musteen:** Well, they were pretty serious. They were very good-natured about the whole thing. The Navy named it Operation Calamari.

**Ari:** Operation Calamari was a success. After arriving at the Air Force base, the squid were loaded onto a truck. Working two days straight with loading cranes, fiberglass molds, and that fluid from 3M, they got the squid into the tanks. And then the team spent two all nighters moving the squid into the museum. At long last, the two giant cephalopods were on display.

**Musteen:** Everybody loves the giant squid. They look for it.

**Ari:** How many places can you go in the world and see a giant squid?

**Musteen:** Right now we're the only one in the United States that has a giant squid on display.

**Ari:** Rock on.

**Musteen:** Thank you.

**Ari:** After talking with Elizabeth Musteen, I wandered over to the squid in the museum and asked a few of the visitors what they thought.

**Visitors:** It's bigger than I imagined. The coloration looks kind of like raw beef, actually. It made me hungry. It's cool. What's cool about it? It's really, like, humongous. It's long! It looks fierce. Pretty surprising. It's hard to believe that there's anything quite as large as that swimming around in the ocean.

## Meet the Scientist

Meet Elizabeth Musteen, the scientist you heard featured in the Giant Squid podcast:



### ***Where do you work?***

Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, Office of Exhibits

### ***What do you study?***

As a project manager in the Office of Exhibits, I supervise the creation of permanent exhibits from the conceptual design stage through construction and opening day.

### ***What are three titles you would give yourself?***

Wanna-be gourmet, problem-solver, mom

### ***What do you like to do when you are not working?***

During the design phase of an exhibit, I spend a lot of time watching how visitors interact with various items in existing exhibits. When we begin construction, I am on the construction site almost all day, every day.

### ***What do you like most about science?***

I never know what to expect! I've gotten to hold the Hope Diamond during work on the Geology, Gems and Minerals exhibit; I've sewn up a giraffe skin during work on the Behring Mammals Hall, tried to work with butterflies flying all around me during the co-evolution exhibit with the Butterfly Pavilion and handled a giant squid while working on the Sant Ocean Hall. I never have a "regular" day at the office!

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The One Species at a Time podcast series is supported by the Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology.