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FAMILY ARGONAUTIDAE Tryon, 1879

ARGO

Argonautidae Tryon, 1879, Man.Conch., 1:138.

FAO Names : En - Argonauts; Paper nautiluses
 Fr - Argonautes papier
 SP - Argonautas

General Remarks on the Family : The argonauts or paper nautiluses (a misnamer, use of which must be discouraged) are very abundant in tropical to warm-temperate waters of the world. A large number of nominal species exists, but the group needs revision to verify the species, perhaps 6 to 8 in all. The family is monotypic. The "shell", actually in incubation chamber for the eggs, is popular among collectors because of its beauty, coloration, sculpture and fragility. The largest species, Argonauta argo, attains a maximum size of nearly 30 cm shell diameter; it enters fish markets in India and Japan when fortuitous oceanographic conditions cause mass aggregations so that large numbers can be captured. Normally it is a non-schooling, solitary group.

Diagnostic Features : Sexual dimorphism very marked, with adult females relatively large, up to 10 to 15 times larger than adult males; hectocotylus of males autotomous (self-amputating) into the egg mass that is attached inside a large, external, calcium carbonate egg case ("paper nautilus shell") in which the female also resides, holding on to the case with extremely broad webs on the dorsal arms (1); suckers biserial; web weakly developed; no water pores; no shell vestige.

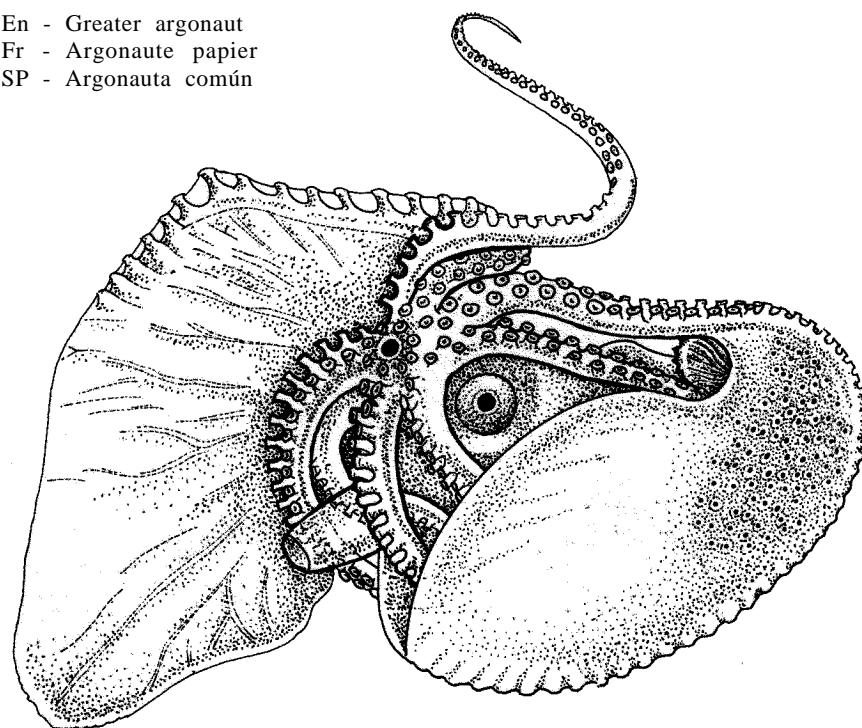
Argonauta argo Linnaeus, 1758

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Argonauta argo Linnaeus, 1758, Systema naturae (ed. 10, 1894):708 (part).

Synonymy : None.

FAO Names : En - Greater argonaut
 Fr - Argonaute papier
 SP - Argonauta común



Diagnostic Features : Sexes grossly dimorphic (males minute). Description for females: Mantle narrowly to broadly oval, bluntly pointed posteriorly; mantle opening very broad. Head small, short; eyes prominent. Arms long, subequal; arms I thick at base with a very large membranous flap that extends nearly their entire length; the web secretes, envelops, and holds the thin white calcareous "shell" in which the female resides, lays eggs, and incubates them.

Geographical Distribution : Worldwide in tropical and warm temperate seas.

Habitat and Biology : An epipelagic, oceanic species, occurring in near-surface waters; males possess a large, conspicuous hectocotylus that autotomes and remains in the shell (egg case) of the female to fertilize the eggs; no spermatophores. Occasional mass occurrences are reported near-shore as a result of changed currents. The species is heavily preyed upon by epipelagic predators such as tunas, dolphinfishes, billfishes, etc.

Size : Maximum length of shell to 30 cm in females; mantle to 12 cm; males are of dwarf size, only 1.5 to 2 cm in total length.

Interest to Fisheries : Occasionally found in markets in India and Japan; probably there are no directed fisheries, but fortuitous catches up to several hundred kilograms are landed.

Local Names :

