

# LIFE BENEATH THE SEA

Humans are land-dwelling mammals that roam the Earth, working and looking for food. We go about our daily business, hardly giving a thought to the fact that there is a whole world of aquatic creatures that rule the waters that surround us, in an exciting life beneath the sea!

## THE GREAT BARRIER REEF

Did you know that The Great Barrier Reef is the world's largest coral reef system? It's made up of over 2,900 individual reefs and 940 islands, covering roughly 345,000 square kilometres! It is located in the Coral Sea, just off the coast of Queensland, and was named in 1981 as a World Heritage Site.

Seen from outer space, the reef is made up of (and was built by) billions of tiny organisms called Coral Polyps. Alongside these organisms there are many other life forms living in the reef, including endangered and vulnerable species. It is home to more than 1,500 species of fish, 411 types of hard coral, one-third of the world's soft corals, 134 species of sharks and rays, six of the world's seven species of threatened marine turtles, more than 30 species of marine mammals (including the dugong), 3,000 molluscs and thousands of different sponges, worms and crustaceans, 630 species of starfish and sea urchins, and 215 bird species!

A large part of the reef is protected by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, which helps to make sure it is not being affected by excessive human use, such as fishing and tourism. These measures of protection are put in place to ensure that the reef is healthy and can continue keeping these wonderful creatures alive.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Using its web-like skin between its arms, an octopus can carry up to a dozen crabs back to its den.

The starfish has an eye at the tip of each arm.

Sharks need to swim, or they will sink. They even swim whilst they are sleeping!

Oysters can change from one gender to another and back again depending on which is best for mating.

Fish have a balloon-like bladder inside their body to help them float.

A dolphin's hearing is so acute that it can pick up an underwater sound from 24 kilometres away.

