

Parting Shot

Whale-kill. Presumably killed by a bite that took out the head and a large chunk of internal organs, this female giant octopus (Haliphron atlanticus) was observed floating off the Azores. It brought to the surface some interesting questions: What killed it? Why was it only partially eaten? Why bright red?

The colour is probably the easiest to explain. Red pigment is relatively cheap to make in terms of energy required. But also, red light can not penetrate any where near the depths below 300 metres where this species lives. In the darkness of the abyss, red pigment absorbs whatever light from the blue end of the spectrum that reaches it, reflects none, and so cloaks the animal in black invisibility.

Colour though, is no defence against predators quipped with effective acoustic echo-location systems. Pings returning from dense but squishy tissue, will be vastly different from those bouncing off hard rock. So the killer was highly likely to have been a whale of some type; sperm whales and beaked whales would be the prime suspects. The shape of the bite - wedge shaped, and seemingly caused by a narrow jaw - perhaps offers additional evidence for that.

But why only partially eaten? Perhaps, with an abundance of food, predators can be selective and only take the choice cuts from their prey. Perhaps the energy yield from the head and internal organs is higher than from the remainder of the mantle and tentacles. Bears fishing for salmon in the Arctic autumn, rip away and eat only the fat-rich skin, and discard the seemingly valuable pink flesh for scavengers. Perhaps toothed whales do



Canon 7DMk11. Canon EF 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L IS II USM

the same. Or perhaps it was simply that some event interrupted the meal, and the carcass floated away after the killing bite had been delivered, and before more of the animal could be consumed. In this

case, the photograph raises more questions than it alone can answer.

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**Do you have a shot which has a story within a story?
If so e mail it with up to 500 words of text
and yours could be the next Parting Shot.**

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