

A GIANT SQUID IN NEW YORK CITY

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On June 10, 1998 a giant squid arrived at the American Museum of Natural History. The squid, a specimen of Architeuthis kirkii Robson, 1887, was caught by commercial fishermen along the Chatham Rise off New Zealand in late December, 1997, while trawling for fish at a depth of 672 m. The fishermen immediately froze the specimen and contacted S. O'Shea who telephoned N. Landman and offered the squid to the American Museum as a gift of the New Zealand National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA). The squid was transported via refrigerated truck from Wellington to Auckland, New Zealand, then by air cargo from Auckland to New York (with a stop over, and unscheduled delay, in Los Angeles), and then by refrigerated truck to the Museum. The squid was injected with and fixed in a bath of 10% saline formalin solution. After two weeks in this solution, the squid was bathed in freshwater and then preserved in 70% ethanol. The two long tentacles are broken off but otherwise the specimen is in an excellent state of preservation with only minor damage to the fin and one of the arms. (A pair of tentacles was procured from another New Zealand specimen of similar size to assemble a complete giant squid for public display.) The specimen is relatively small (dorsal mantle length = 1.24 m), and was originally thought to be a juvenile. However, the presence of a penis and the discovery of a spermatophore indicate that it is a mature male. Mature females of this species from New Zealand tend to be larger with a mantle length of as much as 2 m. Seven other specimens (5 mature males and 2 mature females) were captured at this location during the same time period (December-April). These occurrences suggest that the austral summer may coincide with the time of mating. Further inspection of the historical records of giant squid sightings may reveal insights into the life history patterns of these enigmatic animals.