

Saving the Nautilus

The chambered nautilus is one of Earth's oldest animals. Now, scientists say it may be in danger.

A boat rocks gently in the warm, clear water off the coast of Lizard Island, in Australia. At night, researchers on board the boat are busy. They lower into the ocean three large iron traps with raw chicken inside. Video cameras are attached to the traps. The researchers watch and take note of how many nautilus, attracted to the meat, swim past the traps overnight. In the morning, the

team hauls the traps back onto the boat. They measure, tag and photograph captured nautilus before releasing them. Scientist Peter Ward, of the University of Washington, is leading the study. "We need to know how many nautilus there are," he told TFK. "Thousands? Hundreds?"

Why does the number of creatures matter? Information collected around the world by Ward and other scientists will help to show if the nautilus is threatened and if the animal should be listed as an

endangered species.

Nautilus have survived for more than 500 million years. But some scientists fear that the animals may be in danger of disappearing. Humans have been killing the animal for its unique shell. The inside of the shell is pearl colored and forms a perfect spiral (see "Meet a Nautilus"). It is used to make decorations and jewelry.



These necklaces are made with shiny, spiral nautilus shells.

A Call to Action

At a meeting of scientists in France in 2010, Patricia De Angelis, of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, reported that between 2005 and 2008, 579,000 nautilus-shell products were **imported** to the U.S. from other countries.

Ward thought that number

was alarmingly high. So he came up with a plan to study and count nautilus. He began his work this summer. He is now in Australia. Four more seagoing research trips are expected to take place in the months ahead.

There is much to learn.

"We're really at the tip of the iceberg," De Angelis says.

Kids Can Help Too

After reading an article about nautilus and Ward's study, Josiah Utsch, 11, decided to take action to protect his favorite sea animal. Josiah and his friend Ridgely Kelly, 10, started a website called savethenautilus.com. "We wanted to educate people," Josiah says. Money raised by the

site goes to support research.

Ward hopes more kids will pay attention to the **plight** of the nautilus. "I'm going to try to save this thing," he says. Getting kids involved, he adds, is "the single best way to do that."

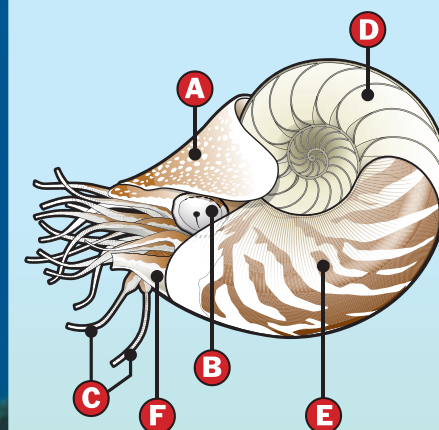
—By Jaime Joyce

Power Words

import verb: to bring into a country

plight noun: a difficult or harmful situation

The chambered nautilus usually lives near coral reefs.



A. When in danger, the nautilus can pull itself completely into its shell and seal itself in by closing its tough, fleshy **HOOD**.

B. The nautilus's **EYES** are between its hood and tentacles. They do not have lenses. Water can flow in and out of the eyes.

C. The nautilus has up to 47 pairs of **TENTACLES**. It uses these armlike parts to smell, and to handle food.

D. Inside the nautilus's shell, there are **CHAMBERS**, or sections, that form a spiral. The animal lives in the chamber closest to the shell opening. As the nautilus grows, it adds more chambers.

E. The nautilus's **SHELL** is thick and hard. It has stripes on the outside. Inside, the shell is shiny.

F. The nautilus spits water out of the **FUNNEL** to help propel, or push, itself through the water.

Think

Should nautilus-shell products be sold in the U.S.? Why or why not?

ILLUSTRATION BY TREVOR JOHNSTON FOR TIME FOR KIDS

