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Ethereal in appearance, the moon jellyfish (Aurelia aurita) occurs in many parts of the world but has only recently been recorded in South Africa, between False Bay at Cape Town and Saldanha Bay. It feeds on tiny animals in plankton, including the larvae of fishes, which it captures with the folded lobe-like appendages spreading from its central mouth. Although some species, such as the box jellyfish Carybdea, can inflict acutely painful stings with their long, trailing tentacles, the moon jellyfish has tiny tentacles and is harmless to humans.

Photo and text: George Branch
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