

# Science Focus

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## EYE OPENER

### A helping hand

#### INTERNATIONAL SPACE STATION

The cube floating at the front of this image is one of three Astrobee – semi-autonomous robots that fly around inside the International Space Station (ISS) helping astronauts with routine duties (think 'busy work', such as taking inventory, filming experiments and moving cargo). But this one's just had an upgrade, in the form of those blue, tentacle-like appendages protruding from its top.

The Responsive Engaging Arms for Captive Care and Handling (REACCH) system is being developed to handle satellite maintenance. For now, however, it's being put through its paces inside the ISS – under the watchful eye of NASA astronaut Sunita Williams, the commander of Expedition 72.

REACCH's design consists of four flexible arms that can extend and embrace objects regardless of their shape. On the end of each arm is an adhesive pad, inspired by a gecko's fingertips, to help it grip anything it grabs. In tests, REACCH has been able to catch items, including flat panels of aluminium and acrylic, as well as rough, textured objects.

Researchers hope to put REACCH to work servicing satellites in low Earth orbit to extend their lifespans, as well as remove debris from their paths.

NASA

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