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SchisturaLarketensis: New Species of Blind Fish Discovered Inside Meghalaya Cave (Download PDF)

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Scientists discovered a new species of blind fish named 'Schisturalarketensis' inside a cave in 'East Jaintia Hills' district of Meghalaya. Fish is named after Larket village, where the cave has been found, to encourage local people to take up biodiversity conservation.



Image of Blind Fish 'Schisturalarketensis'

Key Facts

- The species has apparently lost its sight living in the perpetual darkness inside the cave.
- The species also lost its pigments while adapting to its habitat in the dark waters.
- The orbital diameter of fish decreases gradually as it matures, with eyes completely absent in older individuals.
- Small and faintly blackish spot-like depressions are seen in place of eyes, indicating evolutionary and morphological adaptations.

Where was the fish found?

- Researchers found the blind fish in the cave several years ago during an expedition in a cave in 'East Jaintia Hills' district of Meghalaya.

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Map of East Jaintia Hills

- The cave is about 880 meters above sea level and over 7 km in length.
- The fish sample was collected from small stagnant pools, a few square meters in area and about 1 - 2 m in depth, about 1, 600 feet from the main entrance of the cave. The pool bed is mostly sandy with pebbles.
- Other species found inside the cave include weakly pigmented crabs and crayfish, spiders, crickets, cockroaches and millipedes, small frogs and snakes.

Significance of the Discovery

- Although there are about 200 known species of similar kind inhabiting streams and rivers throughout Indochina and Southeast Asia, this is the first such discovery, according to the researcher.
- The new fish species can be immediately distinguished from all other species of Schistura, barring Schistura papulifera

Which Fish is Similar to the New Fish Species?

- Another cavefish from Synrang Pamiang cave system in the same district is similar due to its vestigial subcutaneous eyes appearing as black spots.

What is Bothering the Researchers about Jaintia Hills?