Deep-Sea Marine Life

Researchers discover possible new shrimp species and other deep-sea creatures.

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One of the new images taken on the deep-sea research mission was this photo of the viperfish (Chauliodus sloani) by David Shale.

An international research team collected hundreds of marine specimens during a 5-week expedition along the Mid-Atlantic Ridge. A scientist from the University of Aberdeen led the 31-scientist research team, surveying various depths of 2,500 to 11,500 feet. Their work has brought new information and insights, images and marine life specimens, with one species thought to be new to science.

The new species is an Ostracod, or seed shrimp, that was found swarming in large numbers on the western side of the ridge. Experts will determine whether this is a new species, describe it and allocate a name.

“It is like surveying a new continent half way between America and Europe,” Professor Monty Priede, director of the university’s Oceanlab, said. “We can recognize the creatures, but familiar ones are absent and unusual ones are common. We are finding species that are rare or unknown elsewhere in the world.”

The team of scientists mapped over 1,500 square miles, exploring the deep-sea creatures living in the depths of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge. They used the latest technology to learn more about what is living in this relatively unexplored deep-sea environment using remotely operated vehicles equipped with digital cameras.

Eight deep-sea cameras were able to capture images of life on the peaks and valleys of very rugged terrain. Colorful sponges and corals encrust rocky cliffs, whereas areas of soft sediment are populated by starfish, brittle-stars, sea cucumbers and burrowing worms. Fish, crabs and shrimp forage over the ridge exploiting whatever they can find.

“We are trying to imagine what the north Atlantic would be like without the ridge that literally cuts it in half, as we think it has a major effect on ocean currents, productivity and biodiversity of the North Atlantic Ocean,” Priede said.

The team left behind automatic equipment on the sea floor at six observing stations that will continue measurements and photography over the next two years. Further voyages are planned in 2008 and 2009 that will include retrieval of the gear.