Half-animal, half-plant microbe found

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Japanese scientists have found a mysterious marine microbe, half the cells of which eat algae like animals while the rest perform photosynthesis like plants.

Professor Isao Inoue, a member of the University of Tsukuba research team, told the Mainichi Daily News he believes the microbe demonstrates part of the process of single-cell marine microbes evolving into plants.

The research team discovered the single-cell microbe, a kind of flagellate, on a beach in Wakayama Prefecture, and called it "hatena" or "mystery."

The microbe is originally green and is made up of algae. When it divides into two cells, one takes over the algae from its parent and remains green and the other turns colorless, Mainichi reported.

The animal-type colorless cell develops an organ like a mouth and uses it to eat algae, while the plant-type green one uses algae it has in its body to perform photosynthesis and produce energy, according to the team.

The researchers believe that as the marine microbes evolve into plants, only the chloroplasts in algae they had taken in their cells developed, while the other organs degenerated.