

Fruit fly 'spineless' gene studied

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New York University researchers have discovered a gene that's involved with a fruit fly's antenna development also gives the organism its color vision.

NYU Biology Professor Claude Desplan and his students made the discovery, with University of Washington Professor Ian Duncan and his wife, Research Assistant Dianne Duncan, providing the Desplan laboratory with fruit fly clones, mutants and technical assistance that helped locate where the gene, called spineless, is expressed in the fly's retina.

"Spineless plays a key role in the antenna and maxillary palp, the two major olfactory organs of the fly," said Ian Duncan. "It's also important in mechanosensory bristles and in the taste receptors of the legs, wings, and mouth parts. There has been a sensory theme to the gene, and now we learn from Claude's work that it plays a key role in color vision."

The collaborators published their results in the March 9 issue of the journal Nature.

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