Scientists conduct DNA tests at sea

April 25 2006

Scientists have, for the first time, used DNA sequencing at sea in the Atlantic Ocean to identify a previously unknown life form.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration ship left Charleston, S.C., April 10 to study deep sea marine life in the Atlantic Ocean's Mid-Atlantic Ridge.

The international team has collected about 300 species so far, chief scientist Peter Wiebe of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution said during a Monday telephone conversation with the Charleston Post and Courier.

Previously, marine life specimens had to be returned to land-based laboratories for DNA analysis. But the DNA testing must occur quickly, since the sea creatures are accustomed to the cool conditions of deep ocean waters, Martin Angel of the National Oceanography Center of England told the newspaper. He is also on the ship.

The scientists say they expect to discover about 7,000 new species to be identified through DNA testing by 2010. They are using special nets to capture specimens more than three miles below the ocean's surface.

Wiebe told the Post and Courier he expects ocean research stations to begin routinely conducting DNA analyses now it's been proven it can be done.

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Citation: Scientists conduct DNA tests at sea (2006, April 25) retrieved 19 April 2024 from https://phys.org/news/2006-04-scientists-dna-sea.html

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