Creatures from the deep exposed

March 11 2011

Actinauge richardi. Credit: Joint copyright © Defra, JNCC, Marine Institute, BGS, UoP, 2007

An academic from the University of Plymouth has helped unravel the largely unexplored weird and wonderful world of deep-sea marine life.

Videos and images of bizarre animals lurking hundreds of meters in the depths of the ocean provide a valuable insight into this mysterious habitat, thanks to a groundbreaking new website which allows academics and researchers to share their findings.

Dr. Kerry Howell, an academic research fellow in the University's Marine Biology and Ecology Research Center, and her Ph.D. student Jaime Davies, have spent five years painstakingly putting together images of over 460 species of deep-sea creatures which live at depths of up to 2,000 metres for their site.

Many of these bizarre creatures have gaping mouths, bioluminescence and stretchy stomachs to help them survive in an underwater world short of light, where the temperatures can be extreme and where food is in short supply.

The website will help scientists and researchers to map the wildlife of the oceans and assess impacts which can affect changes to sealife including changes in fishing activity, development of emerging energy, extraction of oil and gas, impacts of climate change, warming oceans or oceans becoming much more acidic.

Dr. Howell said: "The website is the first of its kind that is openly accessible for academics to share their findings and is helping to standardize the identification of deep-sea species.

"It gives an insight into a deep sea environment which is less explored than the surface of the moon. Some of the creatures are beautiful, while others are right out of a horror movie!"

The deep sea creatures can be viewed at: www.marlin.ac.uk/deep-sea-species-image-catalogue

The Census for Marine Life, a global network of researchers in more than 80 nations, estimates that about 230,000 species of marine animals have been discovered, and that there could be a total of between 500,000 and 10 million species in the sea.

Scientists use submarines —either manned or remotely operated vehicles – that are controlled from the ship at the surface to discover and record marine life.

Provided by University of Plymouth