

Mysterious glowworm found in Peruvian rainforest

November 21 2014, by Bob Yirka



Credit: Jeff Cremer

(Phys.org) —Wildlife photographer Jeff Cremer has discovered what appears to be a new type of bioluminescent larvae. He told members of the press recently that he was walking near a camp in the Peruvian rainforest at night a few years ago, when he came upon a side of exposed earth upon which there were many little green glowing dots. Taking a closer look, he found that each dot was in fact the glowing head of a

worm of some sort. He posted pictures of what he'd found on Reddit which were eventually spotted by entomologist Aaron Pomerantz, with the Tambopata Research Center. After contacting Cremer, Pomerantz made a pilgrimage to see the worms, gathered some samples and set to work studying them. Shortly thereafter, he determined that the worms were the larvae of an unknown type of beetle, likely a type of click beetle.

Further study of the half inch long larvae revealed that the photoluminescence served just a single purpose, attracting prey. They would sit waiting with their jaws spread wide open. When the light they were emitting attracted something, typically ants or termites, the jaws would snap shut capturing the bug thus providing a meal. Pomerantz collected several samples of the larvae and took them back to a lab where they were tested—he and his colleagues found the larvae would snap shut on just about any bug that touched its jaws. He compared them to the giant worms in the 90's sci-fi comedy, Tremors—only these were much smaller of course.

In the wild the larvae live in the ground—they push just their heads out, keeping their bodies hidden, revealing just their glowing heads—bugs, like moths to a light on the porch in summer, are attracted to the light and get eaten.

The team members still don't know what kind of beetle the larvae would grow into, but are determined to find out—they aren't even sure if they are from known species. There are a lot of different kinds of click beetles, approximately 10,000 species, about 200 of which are known to be bioluminescent. The entomologists believe the [larvae](#) get their luminescence from a molecule called Luciferin, which is also found in the compound used by fireflies to light up the night sky.

More information: [blog.perunature.com/2014/11/un ... tery-at-](http://blog.perunature.com/2014/11/un-...-tery-at-)

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