

# Underwater crustaceans could solve missing plane mystery

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A piece of an airplane wing that washed ashore on the island of Reunion in the West Indian Ocean this week is believed to be from missing Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, according to some reports.

The plane carrying 239 passengers and crew went missing on March 8, 2014 on its way from Malaysia to China, and for 17 months the world has been waiting for a tangible clue as to what happened. One piece—or, in this case, several pieces—of evidence that may help officials determine if the debris came from Flight 370 are the barnacles growing on the debris.

Brian Helmuth, a professor at Northeastern's Marine Science Center, says that the barnacles could clue investigators in to the debris' likely path as well as to how deep it had sunk in the ocean. A barnacle is a marine crustacean with an external hard shell, which attaches itself to a variety of hard surfaces.

"As anyone who has seen a TV show like *Bones* or *NCIS* knows, the critters that live on a piece of [forensic evidence](#) tell us a lot about where it has been," said Helmuth, an expert in environmental policy, ecological forecasting and sustainability. He holds joint appointments in the College of Science and the School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs.

Helmuth explained that different types of barnacles thrive in different parts of the ocean. Some only live in coastal areas, while others can only be found in the open ocean. The size of the barnacles, he noted, could also be key to figuring out how long the [debris](#) had been in the water.

"The bigger the animals, the longer the wing was likely submerged," Helmuth said. "It's possible investigators could even use genetic information from the [barnacles](#) to back track to a particular region of origin."

Provided by Northeastern University

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