Study Positively Identifies Giant Squid Presence in Gulf of Mexico

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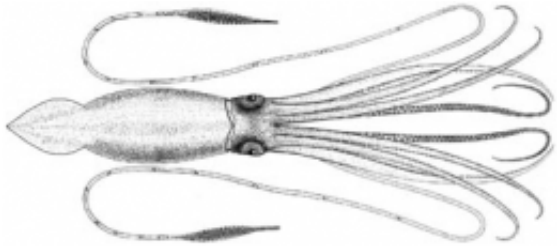

Architeuthis. Image: Wikimedia Commons

(PhysOrg.com) -- During a recent research cruise, a rare giant squid was captured in the Gulf of Mexico.

The research cruise was partially funded through an interagency agreement between the Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service (MMS) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The 19.5 foot long, 103 pound squid was caught at a water depth of more than 1,500 feet in a special trawl net pulled by the NOAA vessel Gordon Gunter during a pilot study for the MMS, "Sperm Whale Acoustic Prey Study."

The two-year, $550,000 MMS prey study hopes to identify the species composition and biomass of squid and fish that represent the feeding base for sperm whales in the Gulf of Mexico.

"This is the first time a giant squid has been captured during scientific research in the Gulf of Mexico," explained Dr. Deborah Epperson, the MMS biologist responsible for this study. Numerous MMS-sponsored studies of sperm whale abundance, distribution, habitat, and response to sound conducted since the 1990's showed the need for more information about their prey which consist mainly of squid and fish.

Photos of the squid were sent to experts around the nation to confirm the specimen was indeed the Architeuthis (Ar-chi-teu-this) species. The giant squid is now at the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of Natural History where it will be studied.

Additional field work for the "Sperm Whale Acoustic Prey Study" is scheduled for early 2010. A survey to assess the relationship between sperm whales and their prey based on lessons learned from this pilot study will be conducted.

Provided by Minerals Management Service