

New species abound in NW Hawaiian Islands

30 October 2006

A three-week U.S expedition to French Frigate Shoals in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine National Monument has returned with scores of new species.

The expedition of world-renowned biologists and support crew returned to Honolulu Sunday with several potentially new species of crabs, corals, sea cucumbers, sea quirts, worms, sea stars, snails and clams.

"It was a very successful expedition by almost any criterion, and the discovery phase has really only just begun," said Joel Martin of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. "What we did not find is also important. There were several groups of animals that we expected to find, but did not find, or found only rarely, such as porcellanid crabs.

"The apparent absence of these common reef organisms may provide insight into how the unique flora and fauna of French Frigate Shoals came to be."

The work was conducted within the borders of the world's largest, fully protected marine area.

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