

NEW SPECIES OF WOOD-BORING, DEEP-SEA MOLLUSC FOUND IN ARABIAN SEA

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Xylophaga nandani

A team of researchers from Kerala and Brazil have identified a new species of a rare, deep-sea mollusc belonging to the family Xylophagidae from the eastern Arabian Sea.

The wood-boring, tiny mollusc species has been named *Xylophaga nandani* after Prof. Bijoy Nandan, dean, faculty of Marine Sciences, Cochin University of Science and Technology (CUSAT).

The discovery is also significant in that this is the first time that a member of the genus *Xylophaga* is being recorded from the Arabian Sea, according to the researchers.

A paper on the findings by Jayachandran P. R. and Jima M. from the Department of Marine Biology, Microbiology and Biochemistry, CUSAT, and Marcel Velasquez from the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil, has been published in the scientific journal *Marine Biodiversity*.

The mollusc was spotted off the Karwar coast. Specimens of *Xylophaga nandani* analysed by the team are tiny - with shell valve length of around 2.2 mm. It is quite possible that they are juveniles, Dr. Jayachandran said.

Members of the family Xylophagidae are deep-sea dwellers, their presence recorded even at depths of 7,000 metres. Commonly found on wood that plunge to great depths, rarely they are also found on wood drifting on the ocean.

As such, much of their lifestyle habits remain a mystery. However, what is known is that they use their shells to cut wood into tiny grains and use it as a source of energy. "The word 'xylophaga' itself denotes 'wood eating'," said Dr. Jayachandran.

They are also close relatives to members of the family Teredinidae, a common species of wood-boring clams (shipworms) found in coastal waters.

Specimens of the newly identified species are kept at the Marine Biology Museum at CUSAT.

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