

NSU Oceanographic Center Professor discovers rare Crustacean

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James D. Thomas, Ph.D., professor at the NSU Oceanographic Center (OC), has discovered a new species of deep-sea amphipod crustacean that is among the rarest crustaceans known to science. Thomas found the small shrimp-like crustaceans living in mated female-male pairs in a glass sponge at 3,700 feet of water off the central Florida coast. Tentatively placed in the family Didymochelidae, only three specimens of this enigmatic crustacean family have ever been collected. Previously known only from deep Antarctic waters, the new genus from Florida is the first record outside Antarctica and the first record from the northern hemisphere.

Sandra Brooke, Ph.D., chief scientist for the cruise, along with OC professor Charles Messing, Ph.D., collected the sponge using a remote-controlled arm of the Johnson SeaLink submersible deployed from the RV Johnson research Vessel, Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution.



In the onboard lab, Thomas carefully dissected the amphipods from the interior canals of the sponge using thick gloves and foot-long tweezers. Glass sponges, called hexactinellids, can cause painful swelling and stinging if they penetrate the skin.
