

Ophiojura - 8-legged starfish full of long, snake-like spines, 8 sets of jaws with sharp teeth

This is Ophiojura, a strange deep-sea animal discovered by scientists from the French Museum of Natural History in 2011, when they were discovered on the top of Banc Durand underground mountain at a depth of 500 meters. below sea level and 200 km east of New Caledonia in the Southwestern Pacific Ocean

It is the first and only specimen of Ophiojura to date. And now it has been scientifically described in a new study. Ophiojura is a brittle starfish, also known as snake-tailed starfish, which is a distant relative of starfish, with eight snake-like legs radiating from its body.



Close-up photo of Ophiojura's 8 toothed jaws

Eight legs, each wing is 10cm long and the top is covered with rows of hooks and spikes, and lots of sharp teeth on the 8 teeth! A microscopic scan shows rows of sharp teeth growing in every jaw used to trap and tear prey. This is an animal like from a nightmare.

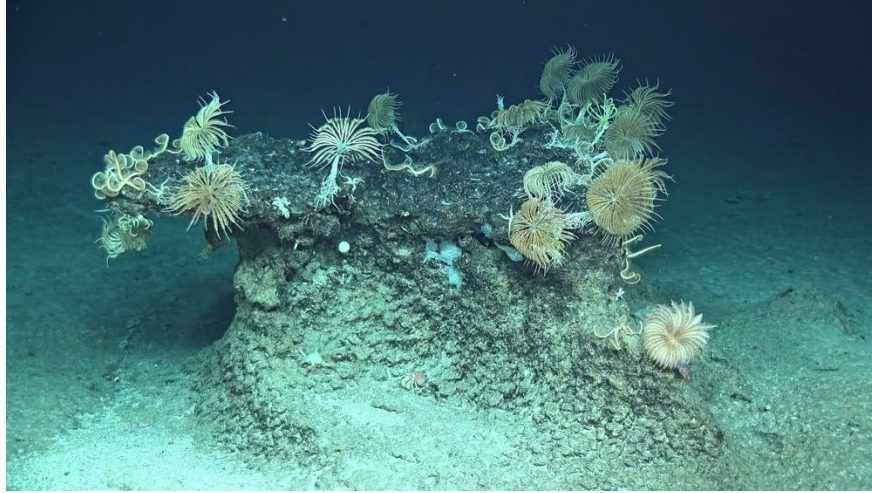


Ophiojura truly represents a completely unique and never-before-seen type of animal. It is one of the last known species of an ancient lineage.

Compare DNA from a range of different marine species and the scientists concluded that Ophiojura diverged from its closest living starfish relative in about 180 million years of evolution. This means that their most recent common ancestor lived during the Triassic or early Jurassic, when dinosaurs were just emerging. Over the past 180 million years, Ophiojura has continued to evolve, albeit very small and barely noticeable.



For life on the seafloor, the center of paleontological endemism lies on the continental margins and subterranean mountains in tropical seas from 200 meters to 1,000 meters deep. This is where we find the "support" of ancient sea creatures - species that have existed in a relatively primitive form for millions of years.



Subterranean mountains, like the one in which *Ophiojura* is found, are usually submerged volcanoes created millions of years ago. Lava flows from vents on the seafloor, continuously creating more layers of basalt to the top of the volcano. Volcanoes can rise out of the sea, forming an island volcano like those in Hawaii, sometimes with coral reefs surrounding its shores.

But eventually the volcano dies, the heavy basalt causes the mountain to sink into the relatively soft oceanic crust. Given enough time, the subterranean mountain would sink hundreds or even thousands of meters below sea level and gradually become covered again in deep-sea fauna.

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