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PHOTO: New Eyeless Crustacean Found in Underwater Cave



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August 26, 2009—With needle-sharp poisonous fangs and powerful limbs sprouting from its head, you probably won't find this crab cousin floating in a creamy bisque anytime soon.

The newfound eyeless crustacean was recently discovered in the world's longest underwater lava tube, on the island of Lanzarote in the Spanish-ruled Canary Islands. (See [map](#).)

Dubbed *Speleonectes atlantida*, after the Tunnel de la Atlantida where it was found, the 0.78-inch-long (20-millimeter-long) [invertebrate](#) belongs to an unusual group of crustaceans called Remipedia, which scientists first identified in 1979.

Twenty-two known species of the predatory Remipedia lurk in underwater caves around the world, from the Bahamas to Western Australia.

(Related photos: "[Spider-Killer Wasp](#), [Eyeless Crustacean Found](#).")

The newest addition to the family sports several pairs of limbs, one of which are equipped with sharp, poisonous jaws that function as hypodermic needles, said study leader Stefan Koenemann of the Institute for Animal Ecology and Cell Biology at the University of Veterinary Medicine Hannover in Germany.

The tiny hunter will grip its prey—such as a much larger cave shrimp—and then inject the poison into its victim.

No other poisonous crustaceans are known, and the Remipedia species' toxic bite "gives them a flamboyant status in crustacean biology," Koenemann said.

These odd critters may also be survivors of an ancient group of crustaceans that were widespread in the Mesozoic oceans more than 200 million years ago, he added.

—Christine Dell'Amore

Photograph courtesy Ulrike Strecker

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