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The living Deep-Sea Dinosaur or fossil fish

COELACANTH LATEIMERIA CHALUMNAE

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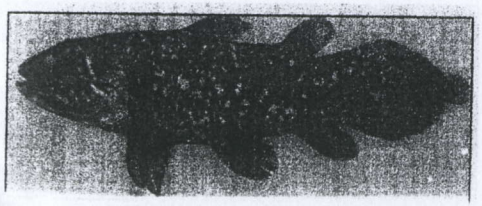
Fish have shown a remarkable persistence, having colonized the waters of the world over four hundred million years ago by adaptation they arrived at the best formula for underwater life. Fish are about 20,000 species, of which about 8,000 or 40% live in freshwaters. Some survive in the depths of the oceans at 7,000 meters or more below the surface. The fossil record shows that three lines of bony fish had evolved, namely the lungfish, the tassel-finned fish and the ray-finned fish. It is very interesting to know that the second line of bony fish, the tassel-finned fish is now represented by only a single species, the famous lobfin



George

Coelacanth Latimeria chalumnae, of which the first specimen was caught by a commercial trawler in December 1938 off South Africa at a depth of 67 meters, and the second off the Comoro Islands, near Madagascar, in December 1952. About a hundred specimens had been caught in the Comoros area on line by native fishermen at depths of 150-400 meters but none survived for more than a few hours; it is believed that the vast pressure changes are fatal to the fish. However, to have come across a living dinosaur will have been scarcely more surprising since the Coelacanths were thought to have become extinct about 70 million years ago. The living form was so similar in appearance to those known only from fossils that it was of the greatest value to explore, at least, the internal anatomy of these primitive fish. The fish has paired fins which move in a similar fashion to human arms and legs. It is dark brown to blue in color with occasional light flecks on the scales. It is a heavy-bodied, excessively slimy carnivorous fish that may grow to a weight of about 90 kilograms.

Now, the good news is what The Globe and Mail newspaper of Canada have published on Monday November 15, 2004, that the 52-year old University of British Colombia, Professor Scott McKinely will be using a bubble-shaped submarine or submersible built by the Canadian North Vancouver Firm called Nuytco Research Ltd. that will enable him to be a depth of 200 meters below the surface of the Indian Ocean, peering through the plastic windows of the submarine. His plan is to track and tag the slow-moving fish by stamping its bony, limb-like fins with acoustic transmitters, using the submarine's robotic arm in order to know more about the world's most un-evolved creatures or living fossils, i.e. there exact habitat, daily habits, what they eat, how long they live, or even how many are left in the sea. Besides, African conservationists want to know more about the creature in order to protect it because this unique fish has gained a high value on the black market, fetching up to $2,000 an ounce. In Africa, Coelacanths have an iconic status on par with the panda bear in China. Professor McKinely is going during 2005 to a five-year research project that will cost up to $5 million. He has compared it to the first missions to the outer space.

Scientists interested to know more about Coelacanth project, can write directly to Professor McKinely, Univertisty of British Columbia, B.C., Canada