

## **Dr. David Woodruff and a team of scientists capture live specimens of rare species of chambered nautilus**

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Live specimens of a rare species of chambered nautilus never before seen alive have been captured in deep water off Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, by two United States paleontologists who are collaborating with two scientists from the University of California.

The paleontologists, Dr. Bruce Saunders, a professor at Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania, and Larry Davis, from Washington State University are teamed with geneticist Dr. David Woodruff from the University of California, San Diego and paleontologist Dr. Peter Ward from the University of California Davis.

The rare species, *Nautilus scrobiculatus*, was first identified more than 200 years ago from its empty shells. Six specimens have now been captured in special traps baited and set at 300 meters depth along the sheer reef face of a small remote island near Manus. The site was chosen on the recommendation of Ron Knight, an authority on Western Pacific shells, who noted that empty shells of the rare species are often found by local residents on the island's beaches. Scientists are particularly interested in the chambered nautilus because it is a living fossil and the only survivor of a once flourishing group, the shelled cephalopods. Nautilus has survived unchanged for tens, perhaps hundreds, of millions of years, while its more advanced relatives, the ammonites, became extinct about 65 million years ago, at about the same time as the dinosaurs.

Studying the chambered nautilus presents many difficulties, according to Dr. Woodruff, as it is found only along remote Indo-Pacific reefs in deep water. By learning how the animal lives and how it has managed to survive, these scientists hope to learn how the ammonites lived and why nautilus has been bypassed by the forces of evolutionary change. The research is being supported by the National Science Foundation in collaboration with the University of Papua New Guinea and Papua New Guinea Fisheries and Wildlife personnel.

For more information contact: Alixandra Williams, 452-3120

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