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Meghalaya's new cave dwelling fish adapts to streams overground - study

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Context

- An **underground cave in Meghalaya**, in focus for a conflict over a Shivalinga-like stone formation, has yielded a new-to-science fish that adapts to streams overground.
- A team of zoologists, led by Kangkan Sarma of Gauhati University's Department of Zoology, has recorded **Schistura densiclava** as a **new species of troglophile loach** from Krem Mawjymbuin in the State's East Khasi Hills district.
- Troglophiles, meaning "cave lovers" in Greek, are **animals that can survive outside caves but often choose to live within them**
- The newly described **loach, a bottom-dwelling fish with barbels hanging from the mouth**, was found in a cool, fast-flowing stream about 60 metres inside the cave
- Belonging to the **Nemacheilidae family**, *Schistura densiclava* is **adapted to the dark, subterranean environment but can also survive in surface waters**. According to the authors, it retains pigment and eyesight, unlike other cave-dwelling fishes.
- The study said the *Schistura densiclava* **males are slimmer with irregular patterns** and puffier cheeks, while the **females are sturdier with consistent markings**.
- "Genetic testing confirmed it as a completely new species... The distribution of the new species is **limited to the cave, which suggests endemism in this cave system**," the researchers said.

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