

YZC Animal of the Month, January 2012

Neptune's Cup Sponge

Poterion neptuni (now known as *Cliona patera*)



This month's animal can be found in the entrance display case of the museum. It's pretty big and, although it might look more like a piece of rock it is in fact an animal. This is the Neptune's Cup Sponge.

Sponges are some of the simplest animals you are likely to come across. They have no organs or nervous system, and most spend their lives stuck to the sea floor filtering tiny bits of food out of the water around them.

There are over 5,000 species of sponge alive today, most living in oceans but some in freshwater (rivers, lakes).

The Neptune's Cup Sponge was first found in 1822. It was named 'Neptune's Cup' after its wine-glass shape and the name of the god of the sea. After their discovery in the Pacific Ocean, these huge sponges were overharvested – so many were taken that by 1908 the species was thought to be extinct. But in 1990 a couple of dead sponges washed up on the coast of Australia, giving hope that live sponges might again be found in the waters around Singapore. In 2011 living specimens were found near Singapore, the first in over 100 years. There is hope now that more sponges will be found – new life for a pretty amazing animal!