

Big-eyed squid looks more like toy than animal



Scientists and technicians scanning the rocky ocean floor off Southern California couldn't contain their excitement when they spotted a bright-purple, googly-eyed stubby squid.

They let out a collective “whoa” on video posted on the Exploration Vessel Nautilus' Facebook page as a camera on a remote-operated vehicle came across the iridescent cephalopod with giant round eyes.

Then the jokes started. “He has weird eyes!” said one enthusiastic observer. “Get close! Get close!” urges another.

One suggested it resembled a child's dropped toy, and another said the creature's eyes appeared to be painted on.

“It looks so fake,” says one member of the Nautilus' team.

The creature looks like a cross between a squid and an octopus but is closely related to a cuttlefish, according to the Nautilus Live website.

The find could be more than just bemusing.

“In addition to the googly-eyed cuteness, there is one thing biologically interesting about this observation,” said cephalopod expert Michael Vecchione of the Smithsonian Institution. The creature could be a new species, he wrote in an email to the expedition.

It was spotted at nearly 3,000 feet deep, which is unusual, but not unheard of. But, on top of that, the stubby squid didn’t have chromatophores, cells that allow it to change color, as members of its species do, Vecchione said.

The question can’t be answered because this particular stubby squid remains deep in the ocean, out of scientists’ reach.

The Nautilus team is part of a four-month Ocean Exploration Trust expedition to map underwater fault zones from Canada to California and understand ecosystems around them.

The team spends hours scanning the barren ocean-scape, “then to come across something adorable like that – it’s a real treat,” Exploration Vessel Nautilus spokeswoman Susan Poulton said.