EARTHJMATTERS

At Depth, the Pill-Bug-Like Bathynomus Takes on Colossal Proportions

Bathynomus giganteus from
above and underneath
(below left).

BY JOEL VV. MARTIN

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n the deep sea, some animals grow to sizes that dwarf their
shallow-water counterparts.
The reasons for the size difference
are still largely a mystery.

Among the Crustacea—ocean-
dwellers with jointed shells such
as crabs and lobsters—no deep-water giant is better known than Bathynomus giganteus. This enormous crustacean—some up to 18 inches long—is closely related to the common "pill bug" you may have seen in gardens around Southern California. Species of Bathynomus are found in most of the world's oceans, with about 14 species worldwide. But, because of the depths in which they are found, we know very little about their natural history. They appear to both hunt and scavenge, feeding on other deep-sea invertebrates and fishes. The Museum's collection of Crustacea contains several of these rare giants of the deep.

The deep sea represents one of the last frontiers on our planet. Yet
^ ironically, we know more about the surface of the moon than
we do about the ocean floor. This is because extreme pressures
and temperatures make exploring the ocean depths difficult
'*^ and expensive. Still, we are learning more about this
environment every day.

Although we once thought of the deep as a barren waste-
land and shamelessly dumped pollutants into the ocean
believing they would do no harm, we now know that the
deep sea harbors untold numbers of species that we have yet
to discover and study. How we treat the ocean floor affects not only the health of the world's oceans and fisheries, but also our own health and well-being.

DR. JOEL VV. IMARTIN IS THE MUSEUM'S CURATOR OF (CRUSTACEA AND (]HIEF OF THE DIVISION
OF INVERTEBRATE STUDIES. AN EXAMPLE OF THE GIANT "ISOPOD" BATHYNOMUS IS CURRENTLY

ON DISPLAY IN THE MUSEUM'S SECOND-FLOOR 13iRE(;roR's CIALLERY.