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Size matters for sex change creatures

REUTERS [THURSDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2003 02:57:27 AM]
LONDON: Size matters, at least when comes to spontaneous sex changes.

Whether it's a tiny crustacean or a 1.5 metre long fish, creatures that spontaneously change their sex do it when they reach 72 percent of their maximum size, scientists said on Wednesday.

David Allsop and Stuart West, of the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, studied dozens of species of sex-changing creatures such as fish, worms, shrimp and molluscs and all of them followed the same rule when altering their gender.

"Ninety-eight percent of the variation in the size at sex change across 121 species can be explained by this rule of 72 percent of maximum body size," Allsop, an evolutionary biologist said in an interview.

Spontaneous sex change is relatively common in lower aquatic species with simple reproductive systems. Half of the creatures will change from male to female and the rest will switch the other way. Regardless of which way they change, the gender-altering creatures can still successfully reproduce afterwards.

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