



Get out...



SA Time: 1:14PM




## Environment

### Size matters for sex-change creatures

October 22 2003 at 01:36PM



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.

#### 'They are mother and father in the same lifetime'

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.

"They are mother and father in the same lifetime. That is the staggering thing about it," he added.

Allsop, who reported the findings in the science journal Nature, said the creatures reach 72 percent of their maximum size and then something triggers the sex change, but they are not sure what it is.

"Our results suggest that the underlying factors favouring sex change are remarkably similar in all animals. More generally, it is amazing that simple theoretical ideas can potentially explain a universal characteristic of growth and reproduction across such different groups," West added in a statement.

**Download the latest ringtones, graphics and picture messages and have some REAL FUN WITH YOUR PHONE at [www.cellphonefun.co.za](http://www.cellphonefun.co.za)**

[Subscribe to IOL's Newsletter](#) [Front Page](#) [South Africa](#) [Africa](#) [World](#) [Science & Tech](#) [A Step Beyond](#) [Picture Gallery](#) [Sport](#) [Tonight \(Chill\) Out](#) [Travel](#) [Weather](#) [Motoring](#) [Career Guides](#) [News I Can Use](#) [IOL Top Stories](#) [Letters & Opinions](#) [Site Feedback](#) [Search IOL Newspapers](#)



### Laugh Out Loud

with IOL's Daily Columnists



#### Related Articles

- [Why boy bees have no dads](#)
- [Underwater bisexual lurks in cartoon fishtank](#)



#### E-mail this story



#### Easy Print



#### Search



#### Top Five Stories

- [Station nightmare: did the brakes fail?](#)
- [Fire causes chaos at Nigeria airport](#)
- [Marching strikers disrupt Joburg traffic](#)
- [Widow admits planning fatal funeral](#)
- ['The Iceman' wrestles shark with bare hands](#)

SEARCH GO ▶▶

NEWS ▼

#### Front Page

South Africa

Africa

World

Science &amp; Tech

Computers / IT

Medical

Space

Environment

Innovation

Discovery

A Step Beyond

IOL Top Stories

Picture Gallery

Sport

Business Report

Personal Finance

Tonight

Travel

Weather

Motoring

Careers

Classifieds

Search Wheels

Search Jobs

Search Property

Newsletter

Letters/ Opinions

Site Feedback

Cellphone Fun

Games

Horoscopes

About IOL

Newspapers

Special Features

Rugby World Cup

Big Brother Africa

Iraq Invasion

Middle East Crisis

Zimbabwe

Focus on Aids

More Features

---

[Back to Top](#)

---

**I** INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPERS



©2003. All rights strictly reserved.

Independent Online is a wholly owned subsidiary of Independent News & Media.

Reliance on the information this site contains is at your own risk.

Please read the [user agreement](#) and [privacy policy](#). Write to [feedback@iol.co.za](mailto:feedback@iol.co.za)

Tel: +27 21 481 6200, Fax: +27 21 481 6292

[Click here for more information on IOL](#)