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A Bizarre Creature with Surprising Abilities

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THE Earth is indeed a big zoo of strange and bizarre creatures. However, some creatures are simply beyond our imagination. A creature inhabited the Earth some 500 million years before the advent of humans on this planet, but we still do not know if it's an animal, or if it's a fungus or it's something between the two.

The strange creature is named *Physarum polycephalum* meaning "many-headed slime". It has been nicknamed "blob" after the 1958 sci-fi horror movie "The Blob". The movie was about an alien that crashes the Earth

and devours everything in its path in a small Pennsylvania town.

This amazing creature "le blob" is the latest attraction of Paris Zoological Park. It lies on a tree bark in a terrarium, which is a sealed glass container with a humid atmosphere, at the zoo Paris' Bois de Vincennes park. Resembling a kind of slippery sponge, the blob is mostly yellowish, but also has variations of red, white or pink. It is found most often on decaying leaves and tree trunks in cool, moist spots such as woods.

Although it appears stationary, it does have a very slow movement of

up to one centimetre per hour. With this leisurely pace, the creature covers the ground without legs, wings or fins in search of prey, such as mushroom spores, bacteria and other microbes.

The blob is a unicellular organism, so it consists of a single cell, sometimes with many nuclei that can replicate their DNA and divide. It has no eyes, mouth, limbs or stomach. However, thanks to its surprising abilities, it can detect the food and ingest it. Though the creature has no nervous system and no brain, it does have memory and the ability to learn. "It is capable of memory, adapting



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its behaviour...behaving a little like an animal,” says Bruno David, director of the Paris Museum of Natural History, of which Paris Zoological Park is a part. Describing the blob as “one of nature’s mysteries”, David further adds, “It surprises us because it has no brain but can learn and if you merge two blobs,

the one that has learned will transmit its knowledge to the other.”

According to researchers at the Paris Zoological park, the blob can solve problems like avoiding traps, finding its way out of a maze to find its food — the oatmeal which it likes most and can even anticipate and adapt to the change in the

environment. A study published in 2016, in the journal *Proceedings of the Royal Society*, found that the blob can learn to ignore things (e.g., coffee) which it does not like.

The most surprising part about the blob is that it has more than 700 genders. So, the creature has many different genetic variations and can procreate on its own. Commenting on the blob’s ability to reproduce, David says, “Cut into two pieces, the blob will self-heal in two minutes! It does not have two different sexes, but close to 720, so reproduction is not a problem.”

Although the blob is reportedly believed to be on Earth for about a billion years, it first gained attention in 1973 when a woman in Texas saw it growing in her backyard. From the point of view of scientists, what is the status of the blob? In the living world, there are animals, plants and fungi. The blob is not any of those things. The scientists, therefore, consider it a protest — a category in which they put in things they don’t really understand.

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