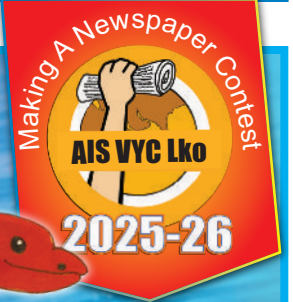


Illustration: Avika Bajpai, AIS VYC Lucknow, XI C



Leptodirus cave beetle

Hidden habitat: Slovenia's deep, narrow fissures
Taxonomic tag: Leptodirus hechenwartii
Cave coping: Pale, slow-moving, able to squeeze through tight spaces; low metabolism suited to nutrient-poor environments.
Food forage: Organic material and small cave invertebrates.
Special skill: No internal body clock or daily (circadian) rhythm.



Blind freshwater crab

Hidden habitat: Sulawesi's flooded cave networks
Taxonomic tag: Cancrocaeca xenomorpha
Cave coping: No eyes; nearly translucent body typical of strict cave dwellers.
Food forage: Small aquatic life and detritus.
Special skill: Possesses very long, slender legs, enhancing its ability to navigate the complex terrain of the cave system and increasing its range for foraging food.



Olm

Hidden habitat: Subterranean freshwater streams and lakes of the Dinaric Alps (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, and Italy)
Taxonomic tag: Proteus anguinus
Cave coping: Blind since birth, pale colour from living in total darkness; enhanced sense of smell and touch to find food.
Food forage: Aquatic invertebrates
Special skill: Ability to survive long periods without food due to extremely slow metabolism.

Far from sunlight and the naked eye, exist cave-dwelling creatures that have evolved in ways that challenge everything we know about life on Earth. Let us accompany Aarnavi Singh, AIS VYC Lko, XII B, as she explores some of the stranger things that inhabit the deepest caverns around the globe.

Huntsman spider

Hidden habitat: Deep in the caverns of Laos
Taxonomic tag: Sinopoda scurien
Cave coping: First known spider species with zero eyes; vision lost entirely as a result of evolution in darkness.
Food forage: Likely small invertebrates and cave insects.
Special skill: Vibration-powered predator navigation due to acutely sensitive hairs on its legs and body.



Blind cavefish

Hidden habitat: Isolated cave aquifers and sinkholes in southwest Madagascar
Taxonomic tag: Typhleotris mararybe
Cave coping: No functional eyes; well-developed lateral line system to detect movement and objects underwater.
Food forage: Small aquatic organisms typically available in subterranean waters.
Special skill: Unlike most cavefish species, its body retains dark pigmentation which potentially provides camouflage.



Dwelling in the deep