

Scientists have uncovered a bright pink color that existed over 1.1 billion years ago. It is over 500 million years older than the previous record holder for the oldest color.

A team from the Australian National University (ANU) discovered what they believe to be the oldest geological colors on record. The bright pink pigments were found deep beneath the Sahara Desert in the Taoudeni Basin of Mauritania in West Africa.

Dr. Nur Gueneli from the ANU Research School of Earth Sciences, who discovered the pigments with his team, said, "the bright pink pigments are the molecular fossils of chlorophyll that were produced by ancient photosynthetic organisms inhabiting an ancient ocean that has long since vanished."

While many colors known today, have theoretically always existed, some colors have existed in nature far longer than others.

In order to study the discovered colors and the rock contents with more ease, the ANU team had to crush the billion-year-old samples into a fine powder. When diluted, the ancient pigments appear bright pink. But when they're concentrated, the fossils can range from a blood red to a deep purple.

Colors produced by organisms that lived more than a billion years ago is no small feat. The dead organic matter, like the cyanobacteria, would have to sink quickly into the seafloor and be completely isolated from any exposure to oxygen, as it accelerates decay. The rock that holds the colorful material needs to then remain in one piece for the billion years.

"The precise analysis of the ancient pigments confirmed that tiny cyanobacteria dominated the base of the food chain in the oceans a billion year ago, which helps to explain why animals did not exist at the time," Gueneli said.

Senior lead researcher, Dr. Jochen Brocks, also stated that the limited supply of large food particles like algae in these ancient African oceans, made it easier for bacteria to thrive.

“Algae, although microscopic, are thousand times larger in volume than cyanobacteria, and are a much richer food source,” Dr. Brocks said in the study’s release.

Brocks further explained in the study that cyanobacterial oceans began disappearing around 650 million years ago, which is when algae began rapidly spreading and growing. That algae ultimately formed the base of a food web that provided the energy needed for the evolution of complex ecosystems, where large animals, including humans, could live on Earth.

But before algae and more-complex organisms took over, Earth was run by pink creating bacteria.

You can find the full ANU study on the world’s oldest color in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (PNAS).

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Science Is Feeling Pretty in Pink! Learn About the World's Oldest Color



Article Name

Science Is Feeling Pretty in Pink! Learn About the World's Oldest Color

Description

Researchers have unearthed the world's oldest color on record, and it's bright pink!

Discover how it formed and after over a billion years, how it was found.