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SPELEAN HISTORY SESSION (Thursday morning)

Disproving a Negative: The Alleged Blind Cave Fish from Pennsylvania Never Existed

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In 1864 Edward Drinker Cope published a report on what he thought to be a new species and genus of troglobitic (blind, depigmented) cave fish, from Pennsylvania. As late as 1986 some authors, based on Cope's article, have continued to assume that there are troglobitic fishes in that state. An analysis of those reports as well as of studies on the fish and cave fauna for Pennsylvania from the historical, biological, and speleological viewpoint is presented. The results of this study fail to provide any evidence that such fish exist or ever existed. The original unsubstantiated reports seem to be based on the assumption that you cannot prove a negative, i.e., that we cannot prove that something does not exist just because we have not found it.