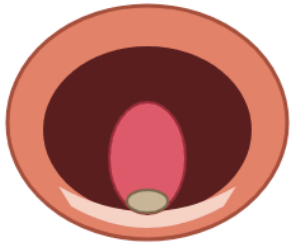
That is why

How does the tongue-eating louse replace a tongue?

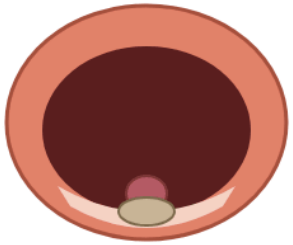
It drains the tongue until it withers, clings to the stub, and the fish goes on using the parasite as its tongue.

A From parasite to tongue, in three steps



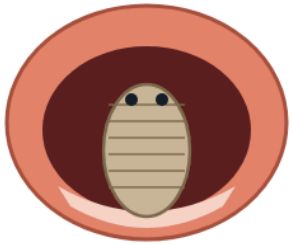
1 Moves in

Attaches to the gills, then clings with its claws to the base of the tongue.



2 Drains the tongue

Cuts into the tongue's blood supply and drinks. The tongue withers to a stub.



3 Takes its place

Clings to the stub. The fish uses the louse much like its old tongue.

Fish mouth seen from the front, simplified. Most often found in snappers.

The only known case

No other known parasite replaces an organ of its host.

B Who becomes female?

1 Everyone starts male

Each young louse begins life as a male.

2 A second one arrives

The first changes into a female: about 0.3 to 1.1 inches (0.8 to 2.8 cm).

3 The male stays small

0.3 to 0.6 inches; mates via the gills.

Is the fish all right?

It depends on the species: some barely notice; others become anemic, struggle to eat or breathe, or die. If the fish dies, so does the louse.

It takes the tongue, then does the tongue's job.

Free for learning thatiswhy.com

Free for learning, teaching and research. Please credit: That Is Why, thatiswhy.com

Diagram: https://thatiswhy.com/diagrams/why-tongue-eating-louse/ · Full guide: https://thatiswhy.com/why-tongue-eating-louse-is-nature-living-prosthetic/