Hybrid butterfly created by scientists

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Scottish scientists say a South American butterfly species was created from two different butterflies in an evolutionary process thought impossible.

Study co-author Chris Jiggins of Scotland's University of Edinburgh told National Geographic News the phenomenon was discovered by successfully creating the butterfly in the lab, using "second-hand parts" from two related species.

The researchers say animals are thought usually to evolve in the opposite manner -- when a single species gradually splits into two over many generations.

They told National Geographic News their creation reveals a process called hybrid speciation, in which the genes of two existing species combine to produce a third. The study suggests hybridization may be more important to the evolution of new animals than previously thought.

Hybrids such as the mule -- a cross between a donkey and a horse -- are sterile. But National Geographic News says the butterfly hybrid brought together a combination of genes that allowed it to breed and, therefore, considered a new species.

The team behind the discovery describes how it re-created the black, red, and yellow Heliconius heurippa butterfly in the journal Nature.