

## UF to auction naming rights for new butterfly species online

October 16 2007

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In an apparent first for butterflies, the Florida Museum of Natural History will auction the naming rights for a newly discovered species online to raise money for butterfly research.

University of Florida researchers George Austin and Andrew Warren discovered the new species of owl butterfly earlier this year. The discovery is significant because the species is large and colorful, and is the first butterfly from this group to be named in more than 100 years. Most newly discovered species are small and unremarkable because the more noticeable ones were discovered long ago.

“It is extraordinarily uncommon for such a large, showy butterfly to have escaped detection until now,” said Warren, a post-doctoral associate at the Florida Museum’s McGuire Center for Lepidoptera and Biodiversity. “This likely will be one of the last times such a large and beautiful butterfly is named.”

In what is believed to be the first time naming rights for a new butterfly species have been auctioned online in North America, the winning bidder will determine the species name following the public auction at iGavel.com, which starts Oct. 22 and ends Nov. 2.

“We realized this striking discovery represents an exceptional opportunity to raise funds for continued research on Mexican butterflies, by allowing rights to the species-level name to be auctioned,” said Austin, who is the McGuire Center collections manager.

Owl butterflies are some of the most familiar and best-known butterflies in the world due to their large size and striking wing eyespots. The new owl species belongs to the *Opsiphanes* group. It has a wingspan of about 4 inches and a beautiful orange color, and lives in the Sonoran Desert in northwestern Mexico.

Surprisingly, Austin came across the species while curating butterflies at the McGuire Center, which holds one of the world's largest collections of Lepidoptera at more than 6 million specimens, and called Warren.

Austin said that as a result of ongoing museum and field research, it is not unusual for scientists to discover several new butterfly species each year. But most often, these new species are discovered among the smaller, less remarkable butterfly groups and are frequently confusingly similar in appearance to already described species.

Austin and Warren are lead authors of the original description, scheduled to appear in November's *Bulletin of the Allyn Museum*, a peer-reviewed journal produced by the Florida Museum of Natural History.

Rather than naming the butterfly themselves, the customary practice when new species are discovered, Austin and Warren decided to auction the naming rights of the new species to raise money to support continued research on Mexican butterflies at the McGuire Center. Researchers at the Alfonso L. Herrera Zoology Museum at the National Autonomous University of Mexico are partners in the process.

The naming rights to other animal species have been successfully auctioned. In 2005, the Wildlife Conservation Society auctioned the rights to name a new species of monkey discovered in Bolivia for \$650,000.

In September, an auction of rights to name 10 newly discovered fish

species raised more than \$2 million for conservation efforts in eastern Indonesia, setting a record for this type of event. Prices for the naming rights ranged from \$500,000 for a Hemiscyllium shark from Cendrawasih Bay to \$50,000 for the Pseudanthias fairy basslet.

The winning bidder for the new owl butterfly will have the name of his or her choice applied to the species' formal description, following the rules of the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature. The name will then be used for this species in all future scientific publications and field guides. Proceeds from this auction qualify as a charitable contribution, deductible subject to IRS limitations.

John Calhoun, a research associate at the Florida State Collection of Arthropods, said some have worried that such auctions could have enormous ramifications if species are allowed to acquire commercial value, leading people to “discover” new species solely for the monetary potential.

“However, the rigorous process required to actually publish and validate new species makes this outcome less likely,” Calhoun said. “It must also be remembered that although a name may be purchased, the buyer maintains no ownership or regulatory authority over that species.”

Source: University of Florida

Citation: UF to auction naming rights for new butterfly species online (2007, October 16) retrieved 24 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2007-10-uf-auction-rights-butterfly-species.html>

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