

Hawaii's botanical history is expanded

April 21 2008

Smithsonian Institution scientists say one of Hawaii's most dominant plants, *Metrosideros*, has existed on the islands much longer than previously believed.

The researchers, who said their finding might rewrite Hawaii's botanical history, noted *Metrosideros*, commonly called "ohi'a" in the Hawaiian Islands, has puzzled researchers for years. Although previously thought to be a newcomer to the islands, the plants are well integrated into Hawaii's ecosystems.

However, scientists from the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History and the Smithsonian's National Zoo have now used molecular research to show *Metrosideros* might have colonized the islands soon after they formed.

If the finding is accurate, the plants would have played an important role in shaping Hawaii's ecology from the beginning, the scientists said. Knowing when *Metrosideros* dispersed and colonized the islands will give scientists a better understanding of how and when the fauna that rely on them evolved.

"What we are finding," said Scott Miller, a Smithsonian scientist working on the project, "is a distinct geographical pattern that supports a hypothesis that these plants colonized the Hawaiian Islands sequentially as they formed."

This could prove that *Metrosideros* played a far more important role in

Hawaii's ecology than once thought, he said.

Copyright 2008 by United Press International

Citation: Hawaii's botanical history is expanded (2008, April 21) retrieved 17 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2008-04-hawaii-botanical-history.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.