

New species of sea snake discovered

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Scientists have discovered a new species of sea snake in the Gulf of Carpentaria, northern Australia, which is unique in having raised scales.

The finding published in *Zootaxa* today by Associate Professor Bryan Fry from The University of Queensland's (UQ) School of [Biological Sciences](#) and colleagues from The University of Adelaide, will provide important clues about evolution.

Associate Professor Fry said that *Hydrophis donaldii* had evaded earlier [discovery](#) as it prefers estuarine habitats that are poorly surveyed and not targeted by [commercial fisheries](#).

“Weipa really is one of the last sea snake ‘Serengetis’. We can see over 200 sea snakes in a single night's hunting, whereas sea snake populations have really crashed elsewhere through over-fishing removing their prey and also the snakes drowning in trawling nets,” Associate Professor Fry said.

Associate Professor Fry said the findings extend beyond simply discovering a rare animal.

“All venomous animals are bio-resources and have provided sources of many life-saving medications, such as treatments for high-blood pressure and diabetes.

“This reinforces why we need to conserve all of nature as the next billion

dollar wonder-drug may come from as unlikely a source as [sea snake](#) venom.”

The snake has been given the scientific name *Hydrophis donaldii* to honour Associate Professor Fry's long-time boat captain David Donald.

“Quite simply we would not have found this snake without Dave's unique knowledge of the area. I told him we wanted to survey as many distinct types of [habitat](#) as possible and he guided us to the perfect spots,” Associate Professor Fry said.

The snake has been given the common-name ‘rough-scaled sea snake' to reflect the unique scalation.

“We don't know why it has been evolutionarily selected to have such unique scalation, but we will next study its ecology to learn more about it.”

More information: Paper preview:

www.mapress.com/zootaxa/2012/f/z03201p057f.pdf

Full paper: www.mapress.com/zootaxa/2012/2/zt03201p057.pdf

Provided by University of Queensland

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