

Unearthed: A treasure trove of jewel-like beetles

October 15 2013



This image shows *Baconia carinifrons*, having a vibrant blue color with a distinguishable metallic shine. Credit: Michael S. Caterino

The bottomless pit of insect biodiversity has yielded a treasure trove of new species of jewel-like clown beetles. In a paper published today in the journal *ZooKeys*, Michael Caterino and Alexey Tishechkin of the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History describe 85 new species in the genus *Baconia*, renowned for their brilliant coloration and bizarrely



flattened body forms. The new species bring the genus up to 116 total species.

The <u>new species</u>, mainly from North and South America, were discovered through studies of numerous museum collections, as well as the authors' own fieldwork.

'Although the genus *Baconia* was originally named in honor of Francis Bacon the Elizabethan philosopher, Francis Bacon the experimental artist would also be a fitting namesake for these fantastic <u>beetles</u>', says the study's lead author Caterino.

While many groups of beetles are known for spectacular color patterns, they are rare and little-appreciated in the clown beetle family, Histeridae. 'Even beetle specialists are amazed by the fantastic colors of *Baconia*', observes Caterino. What purposes the colors may serve, however, remains a mystery. 'In natural history terms, the species of *Baconia* aren't very different from several other groups of clown beetles with similar habits, but much duller coloration'.

Their beautiful bodies conceal a vicious disposition, as the species are mostly believed to stalk and eat wood-boring beetles and their larvae. Some are even drawn to pheromones of bark beetles, using their own seductive odors against them. The flattened bodies of many of the species let them pursue their prey deep under the bark of recently killed trees.





The colors of the genus *Baconia* range between blue, green and purple, here is one blue representative, the new species *Baconia disciformis*. Credit: Michael S. Caterino

That the little jewels remained hidden for so long may be partly attributed to their extreme rarity. Although more than 20 museums' collections were assembled for the study, nearly half the <u>species</u> are still known from only one or two specimens. 'Biodiversity science is humbling', admits Caterino. While the study provides a wealth of new data on a neglected group of beetles, 'We know it's still the tip of the iceberg'.





This image shows one of the new species, *Baconia katieae*, a rare example of body maculation. Credit: Michael S. Caterino

'Our greatest hope is that by calling attention to the existence of such exquisite creatures, we will inspire others to go out and seek out new populations and data.'

More information: Caterino MS, Tishechkin AK (2013) A systematic revision of Baconia Lewis (Coleoptera, Histeridae, Exosternini). *ZooKeys* 343: 1. <u>DOI: 10.3897/zookeys.343.5744</u>

Provided by Pensoft Publishers

Citation: Unearthed: A treasure trove of jewel-like beetles (2013, October 15) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <u>https://phys.org/news/2013-10-unearthed-treasure-trove-jewel-like-beetles.html</u>



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.