

Wyoming, Brazilian scientists discover new wasps

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Field work in the cloud forests of Ecuador by scientists from Wyoming and Brazil has led to the discovery of wasps that mummify caterpillars.

A weekend story in the Gillette News Record describes the findings recently published in the open access journal ZooKeys by Scott Shaw of the University of Wyoming and Eduardo Shimbori of the Universidade Federal de Sao Carlos in Brazil. Shimbori is doing postdoctoral research studies with Shaw at the University of Wyoming.

Among the 24 new species is one that causes its host caterpillar to bend and twist in a way that reminded the scientists of belly dancing. They named that wasp the Shakira, after the Colombian singer. Others were named for Jimmy Fallon, Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert and Ellen DeGeneres.

Despite the fanciful names and tiny size—Shaw says the [wasps](#) are only 4 to 9 millimeters long—the species are said to have an enormous impact.

"These wasps are helping to naturally control the populations of plant-feeding [caterpillars](#), so they help to sustain the biodiversity of tropical forests," said Shaw, whose book, "Planet of the Bugs," is scheduled to be published by the University of Chicago Press in September.

The female wasps inject their eggs into a caterpillar. As the wasp larva feeds, the host caterpillar shrinks and mummifies. The young wasp

eventually cuts a hole in the caterpillar mummy and flies away to mate.

The field research was conducted at the Yanayacu cloud forest research station of Napo Province, in the eastern Andes slopes of Ecuador. Previous research by Shaw had led to the discovery of nine species of mummy-making wasps at the site, and others are known from around the world. But the full range the insects in Ecuador did not become apparent until Shimbori and Shaw collaborated to name them all.

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