

Zoologists discover bird species in Indonesia

June 6 2014, by Thomas Deane

(Phys.org) —Zoologists from Trinity College Dublin have discovered a currently unrecognised bird species in a biodiversity hotspot in Indonesia. They propose that the colourful bird, which is found only on one small chain of islands, should be called the Wakatobi Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum kuehni*).

After numerous expeditions to South-east Sulawesi and its offshore [islands](#), the zoologists have published evidence stating that a population of birds from the Wakatobi Islands should be recognised as a unique species. Despite looking similar to the Grey-sided Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum celebicum*) from mainland Sulawesi, Wakatobi Flowerpeckers are significantly larger and genetically distinct. The genetic data from this study revealed that the two flowerpecker species did not mix or interbreed, which in turn suggests that they do not cross the 27 km stretch of ocean between them.

These findings, just published in the open access journal *PLOS ONE*, suggest that the lack of research and particular absence of genetic analyses performed on similar birds has likely led to a significant underestimation of the number of species in the Sulawesi region. This means there are many more [bird species](#) awaiting description and the zoologists are calling for more detailed study of the bird populations in the beautiful and under-explored Sulawesi region as a result.

"Accurate data on the distribution and status of bird species are regularly used to inform conservation practices and industrial development. As humans are changing the natural environments of Sulawesi at an

incredibly fast rate, the discovery and description of species in the region is of major importance," explained lead author of the journal article, and PhD student in Zoology at Trinity, Seán Kelly.

He added: "This study also highlights the need for integrative, multi-disciplinary research in the region. Without this we will likely fail to recognise and appreciate the true biodiversity of this remarkable region. Furthermore, we run the risk of losing evolutionarily distinct species before we can even discover or enjoy them."

The Sulawesi region of Indonesia is part of the [biodiversity hotspot](#) of Wallacea (named after infamous explorer and co-founder of the theory of evolution by natural selection, Alfred Russel Wallace). Despite boasting an incredibly large number of bird species that are found nowhere else in the world, the Sulawesi region has remained poorly studied.

Dr Nicola Marples, Associate Professor of Zoology at Trinity and senior author on the paper, said: "The identification of a species that is confined entirely to the Wakatobi Islands will require conservation organisations such as BirdLife International to reassess the protection status afforded to these islands. While the islands sit within the Wakatobi Marine National Park, they currently receive no protection. The Wakatobi Islands are an incredibly exciting place to work and they serve as a unique living laboratory in which we can study evolution in action."

More information: The complete paper is available online: www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0098694#s1

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