

Barack Obama is officially now a parasite (it's an honor)

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In this July 21, 2016 file photo, President Barack Obama speaks in the East Room of the White House in Washington. Sure it's no Nobel Peace Prize, but Barack Obama has a new honor he can brag about. Scientists have named a parasite after him and there's no worming out of it. Meet *Baracktrema obamai*, a tiny parasitic flatworm that lives in turtles' blood. A new study officially names the two-inch long creature after Obama. (AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais, File)

It's no Nobel Peace Prize, but Barack Obama has a new honor to brag about. Scientists have named a parasite after him—and there's no worming out of it.

Meet *Baracktrema obamai*, a tiny parasitic flatworm that lives in turtles' blood. A new study officially names the 2-inch, hair-thin creature after Obama.

Thomas Platt, the newly retired biology professor at Saint Mary's College in Indiana who chose the name, says it's an honor, not an insult. Really.

Platt, who discovered and named the flatworm to crown his career before retiring, has more than 30 new species to his credit. In the past, he's named them after his father-in-law, his doctorate adviser "and other people I have a great deal of respect for. This is clearly something in my small way done to honor our president," Platt said Thursday.

Platt, who is a distant relative of the president, says people pay thousands of dollars for the privilege of having a species named after them.

Parasites, which live in and get nutrients from host animals, get a bad rap. Platt says this one reminds him of the president: "It's long. It's thin. And it's cool as hell."

Platt says *Baracktrema obamai* "are phenomenally incredibly resilient organisms."

"I hold them in awe and with phenomenal respect," Platt says.

The worm is related, distantly, to a parasite that can cause a devastating disease in humans, but it causes no harm to turtles, Platt says.

Parasites are cool, crucial to life and all around us, says Rutgers biologist Michael Sukhedo, editor of the *Journal of Parasitology*, where the study appears. About 7 out of 10 animals on Earth are parasites, he says.

Naming a new species—especially in the final paper of a career—"is a big decision," Sukhedo says.

Obama already has a spider, a fish and even an extinct lizard named after him.

Although names are usually bestowed as an honor, Sukhedo admits once or twice parasites have been named as a tool of revenge—something Platt says isn't the case here. One time, Sukhedo says, a biologist named an entire group of parasites after her ex-husband: microphallus.

More information: *The Journal of Parasitology*:
[www.journalofparasitology.org/ ... /full/10.1645/15-893](http://www.journalofparasitology.org/.../full/10.1645/15-893)

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