

David Attenborough gains new species namesake

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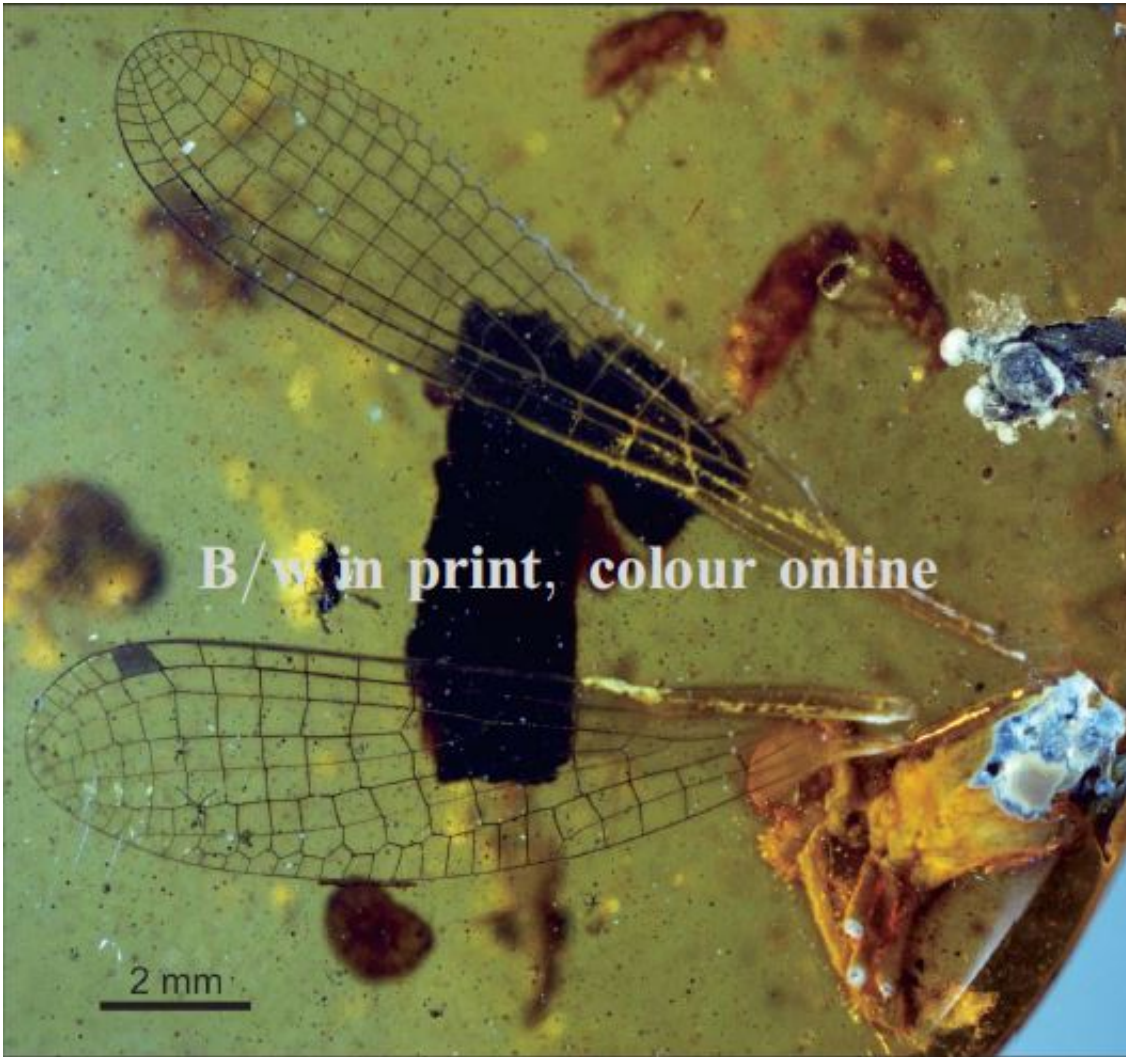
Dragonfly. Credit: Taylor & Francis

A new species of damselfly from the Cretaceous period has been named after the iconic naturalist and TV presenter Sir David Attenborough.

The new [discovery](#), described in detail in *Journal of Systematic Palaeontology*, was made in the Hukawng Valley of Kachin Province in Myanmar. The fossil was found in a piece of mid-Cretaceous Burmese amber. The full scientific name for the new [species](#), belonging to a group more commonly known as shadowdamsels, is *Mesosticta davidattenboroughi*. Researchers decided to name the new species after David Attenborough because of his long-standing appreciation of dragonflies, and to celebrate his recent 90th birthday.

Co-author Professor Edmund A. Jarzembowski said, "Dragonflies in amber are extremely rare and the recent discoveries by my Chinese colleagues are a new window on the past. It is tradition in taxonomy (the naming of a new species) to contact the person concerned. Sir David was delighted because he is not only interested in the story of amber, but also a president of the British Dragonfly Society."

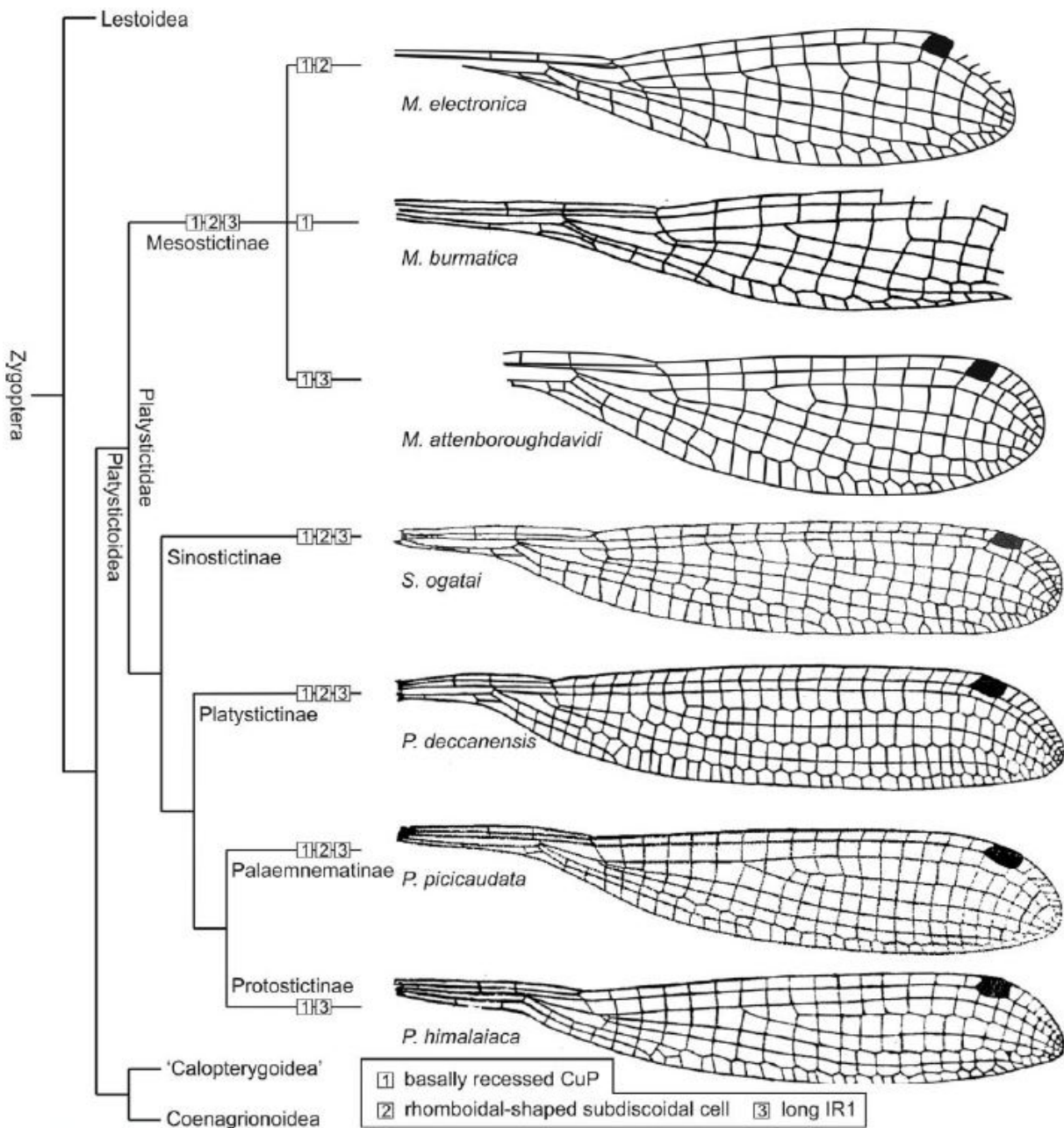
The fossil itself is extremely well preserved as it is encased in yellow transparent amber and includes a complete set of wings. With the aid of photo technology, researchers were able to digitally enhance and build a clear three-dimensional picture of the new species, showing that it differed from previously described fossils, notably in the shorter wing length.



Mesosticta davidattenboroughi sp. nov., holotype, NIGP164541, photograph of specimen. Credit: *Journal of Systematic Palaeontology*

Lead author Daran Zheng from the Nanjing Institute of Geology and Palaeontology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, commented, "*Mesosticta davidattenboroughi* is quite unique because we have uncovered a new species and it confirms the previous attribution of *Mesosticta* to the Platystictidae. It is the first fossil group of modern platystictid damselflies and documents the appearance of Platystictidae as early as mid-Cretaceous."

The discovery of insect remains in amber is not uncommon, however this particular family of damselflies are much less frequently found and their fossil record is poor compared to many other families making the discovery especially unusual. *Mesosticta davidattenboroughi* joins a long list of animals which have been named after Sir David Attenborough, including a weevil and [fossil species](#) of a plesiosaur and a fish.



Hypothetical position of *Mesosticta davidattenboroughi* sp. nov. in phylogenetic tree of Zygoptera. Credit: *Journal of Systematic Palaeontology*

More information: Daran Zheng et al, Mesostictinae subfam. nov., an archaic group of platystictid damselflies (Odonata: Zygoptera) from mid-Cretaceous Burmese amber, *Journal of Systematic Palaeontology* (2017). DOI: [10.1080/14772019.2017.1348395](https://doi.org/10.1080/14772019.2017.1348395)

Provided by Taylor & Francis

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