

Citizen scientists discover pinhead-sized beetle in Borneo

January 31 2019



The newly discovered species of leaf beetle, *Clavicornaltica belalongensis*.
Credit: Taxon Expeditions - Pierre Escoubas

How many citizen scientists does it take to discover a new species? A recent expedition to the Ulu Temburong forest in Borneo proved that you only need 10 enthusiasts with no professional training, yet fueled

with curiosity and passion for the outdoors, to find a new beetle the size of a pinhead in leaf litter.

The species, named *Clavicornaltica belalongensis*, is a tiny, 1.25-mm-long leaf beetle that eats moss on the forest floor. Published in the open-access *Biodiversity Data Journal*, it is the latest discovery from Taxon Expeditions, an initiative that organises scientific field trips to remote and biodiverse locations for teams of scientists and laypeople.

Unlike other science/adventure trips, Taxon Expeditions gives a unique opportunity for laypeople, or [citizen scientists](#), to describe and publish [new species](#) of animals and focus on the thousands of 'little things that run the world'. Thanks to the initiative, they learn about tropical biology techniques while participating in the process of taxonomy and the study of hidden biodiversity.

The new beetle, for example, is one of hundreds of thousands of tiny beetle species that inhabit the [leaf litter](#) of tropical forests and have remained unknown and scientifically unnamed up to our days.

In [a YouTube video](#), Simon Berenyi, who joined the [expedition](#) along with his 14-year-old son, says: 'I had no idea how special this would be; you become a student again—you become a child again.'



Citizen scientists, students, and researchers working together in the rainforest during the Taxon Expeditions field trip in Borneo. Credit: Taxon Expeditions - Pierre Escoubas

Entomologist and founder of Taxon Expeditions, Dr. Iva Njunjic explains: 'We introduce the general public to all these tiny, beautiful, and completely unknown animals, and show them that there is a whole world still to be discovered.'

Last year, another survey in Borneo organised by Taxon Expeditions ended up with the description of a new water beetle species ([*Grouvellinus leonardodicaprio*](#)). Named after famous Hollywood actor and environmentalist Leonardo DiCaprio. The discovery raised a real furore on the public scene, culminating in the new insect [making an](#)

[appearance on the profile image of the celebrity's facebook page.](#)



The Ulu Temburong forest in Borneo. Credit: Taxon Expeditions - Pierre Escoubas

More information: Menno Schilthuizen et al, A new species of *Clavicornaltica* (Coleoptera: Chrysomelidae), discovered and described on a field course to Kuala Belalong, Brunei, *Biodiversity Data Journal* (2019). [DOI: 10.3897/BDJ.7.e32555](https://doi.org/10.3897/BDJ.7.e32555)

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