

Long-haired microbes named after Canadian band Rush

27 November 2017

Credit: Patrick Keeling



Three new species of microbe found in the guts of termites have been named after members of the Canadian prog-rock band Rush, owing to the microbes' long hair and rhythmic wriggling under the microscope.

"A Spanish postdoc, Javier del Campo, asked me to recommend some good Canadian music, and I suggested he listen to Rush," says Patrick Keeling, a University of British Columbia microbiologist and senior author on the paper describing the [new species](#). "He came back to me and said 'Those [microbes](#) we're finding have long hair like the guys on the album 2112!'"

The microbes in question are covered with flagella, which are long threads that cells use to move around. Many cells have a few flagella, but these little rockers have more than ten thousand very long flagella, giving them flowing hair that even Farrah Fawcett might envy.

And while Rush may not be famous for their dance moves, the tiny creatures also have rhythm. They bob their heads and sway their bodies in microscopic dances, prompting the researchers to baptize the new *Pseudotriconympha* species *P. leei*, *P. lifsoni*, and *P. pearti* after musicians Geddy Lee, Alex Lifeson and Neil Peart.

The prototypical Canadian power trio is known for songs such as "Natural Science," "Tom Sawyer" and "Closer to the Heart," and lyrics drawing on themes from science and literature, such as the seminal 1976 album 2112.

The microbe named after drummer and lyricist Peart contains a rotating intracellular structure never seen before. The researchers dubbed this the "rotatosome," and even though they tested

Microbe named after Canadian musician Alex Lifeson.

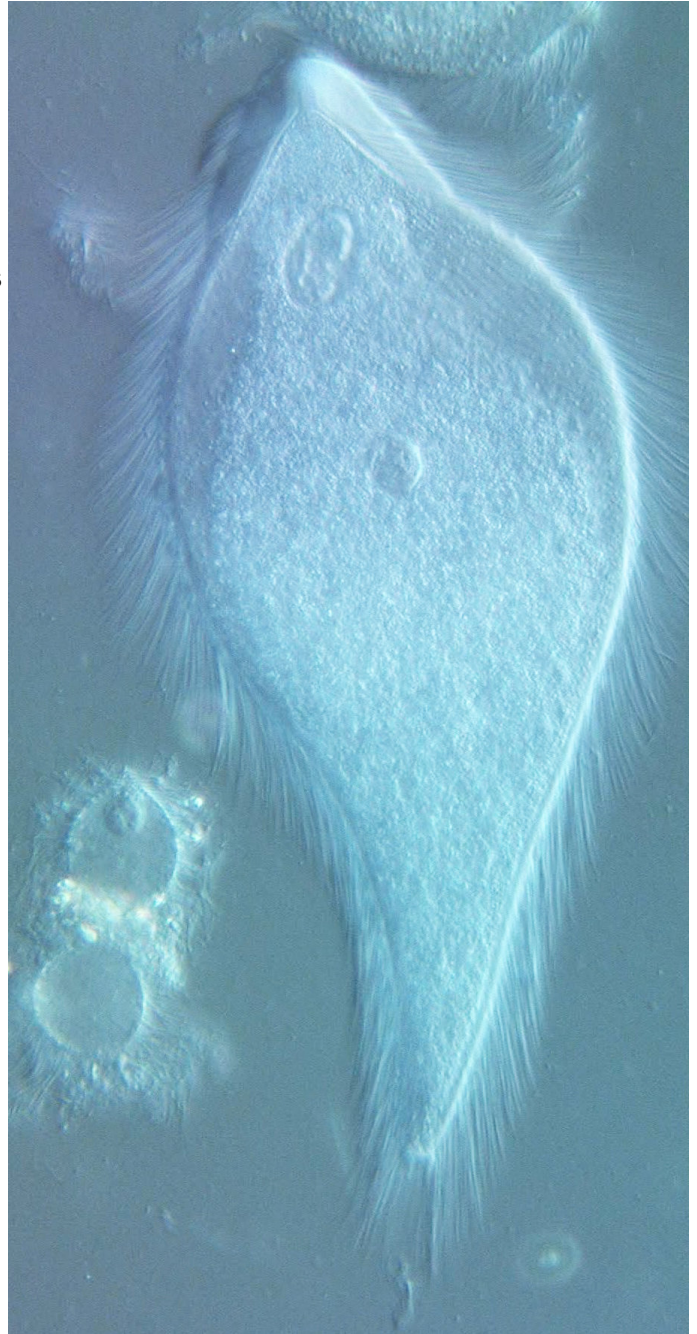
several theories, they still can't figure out what it does.

"We have looked at a lot of crazy cells in my lab, and none of us has ever seen anything like this," Keeling says.

While taxonomy can be a dry topic, some biologists inject a bit of fun with species names. Previously, Keeling's team found another termite microbe which they named Cthulhu, after the terrifying tentacled entity in H.P. Lovecraft's stories.

Pseudotrichonympha leei, *lifesoni*, and *pearti* may come from the same place as Cthulhu (a termite's hindgut), but these dancing, long-haired creatures seem much friendlier.

The researchers outlined their findings in *Scientific Reports*.



Microbe named after Canadian musician Neil Peart.
Credit: Patrick Keeling

More information: Javier del Campo et al. *Pseudotrichonympha leei*, *Pseudotrichonympha lifesoni*, and *Pseudotrichonympha pearti*, new species of parabasal flagellates and the description of a rotating subcellular structure, *Scientific Reports* (2017). [DOI: 10.1038/s41598-017-16259-8](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-017-16259-8)

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