

Pokemon touch to cockroach species found here

Ang Qing

A new cockroach species has been found in a forested nature reserve in Singapore.

Named after Pheromosa, a cockroach-like Pokemon that appears in the seventh generation of the video game series, the species was discovered through comparing differences between the male genitalia of specimens with its closest relative from Borneo, among other checks.

Entomologist Foo Maosheng, who co-authored the finding, said: "There are some similarities between Pheromosa and the delicate cockroach that we found, such as having a long antenna, wings that mimic a hood and long slender legs.

"Both my collaborator and I are Pokemon fans, so we thought, why not name it after a Pokemon inspired by a cockroach."

Entomology is the study of insects and their relationship to humans, the environment and other organisms.

The discovery of *Nocticola pheromosa*, published in the journal of Asia-Pacific Entomology on Feb 27, marks the first time a cockroach from the genus *Nocticola* - which means fond of the night in Latin - has been found here.

Mr Foo, a scientific officer at the National University of Singapore (NUS) Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, said:

"There are very few studies done on cockroaches and termites, in part because they are less charismatic than bees, butterflies and beetles."

The cockroach's identity was a mystery when a few male specimens were collected between 2006 and 2007 in Bukit Timah Nature Reserve during an insect survey.

"There were no formal records of the cockroach in Singapore," said Mr Foo. "Since its DNA did not match any species recorded online, it does add to the suggestion that this species had not been formally documented."

Help arrived when Mr Cristian C. Lucanas, an entomologist from the UPLB Museum of Natural History in the Philippines and the study's lead author, came across pictures of the species on The Biodiversity of Singapore website and contacted Mr Foo to help with his quest.

Realising that the cockroach had not been scientifically documented before, Mr Lucanas decided to publish the findings after dissecting it.

The new species joins 22 others from its genus, which has been found in tropical Africa, India, mainland Asia and South-east Asia as well as Australia.

Unlike hardy American cockroaches, which most people tend to associate cockroaches with, *Nocticola pheromosa* is more delicate as those of its kind tend to live in well-protected ecosystems, said Mr Foo.

But not much is known of the Singapore species.

While some people might be averse to cockroaches, they play a part in the ecosystem, he said. "A few forest cockroaches are pollinators and a handful do help with nutrient cycling.

"Cockroaches do have a role but because of negative connotations and their appearance, they tend to be overlooked even during insect surveys."

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The species is named after Pheromosa, a cockroach-like Pokemon. PHOTO: LEE KONG CHIAN NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM