

Press Release:

New species of tarsier, *Tarsius tumpara*, from Siau Island, North Sulawesi, described and named by an international team.

The Siau Island tarsier, *Tarsius tumpara*, is described and named by an international team headed by Dr. Myron Shekelle, the head of an American science-based conservation organization, *tarsier.org*, based in Burlington, Washington. Other members of the team include: Dr. Colin Groves, author of the book *Primate Taxonomy* and quite possibly the world's most respected authority on the subject, Dr. Stefan Merker, from the University of Mainz, in Germany, and Dr. Jatna Supriatna, the director of Conservation International, Inc.'s Indonesia office. The tarsier was discovered in 2005, when Dr. Shekelle visited Siau Island with his long-term collaborators Yunus Masala, Johnny Lengkei, and Erdenipan Tundu, from Batuputih, North Sulawesi, gateway to Tangkoko Nature Reserve. Interestingly, although these team members are residents of Batuputih, Batuputih, itself, was founded by people from Siau, and all of the Indonesian members of the discovery team trace their ancestry to Siau Island.

Preserving the new tarsier will be a major challenge. Scientists already list it as critically endangered and one of the top 25 most endangered primates in the world. This is because of several issues that are not uncommon in conservation: small extent of occurrence for the species (the island, Siau, is only about 125 km²), very limited remaining habitat (satellite imagery and field surveys indicate no sizable tracts of remaining primary forest), and no protection areas. The Siau Island tarsier is furthermore threatened by two unique threats: Mt. Karengetang, one of Indonesia's most active and most dangerous volcanoes, which dominates 55% of the land area of island, and by the fact that local people eat tarsiers, and other small mammals, as a snack food, *tola-tola*, when they consume a locally produced distilled beverage, *cap tikus*. Thus, the total population size of *Tarsius tumpara* might be as high as a thousand, or so, animals, but it might be much lower than that. Scientists will not know for sure until they return to the island.

The team visited Siau as part of a television nature documentary, *Myths, Monsters, and Hobbits*, by famed documentary maker Lawrence Blair, the elder of the Blair Brothers, who made the Emmy-winning documentary on Indonesia, *Ring of Fire*. The purpose was to discover the new species, whose presence had been predicted by a biogeographic hypothesis published by lead author, Myron Shekelle, the year before. The documentary aired around the world later that year, but the name of the new species remained a tightly held secret. The reason for this secrecy is that taxonomy follows a strict set of rules, and one of the most important of these is nomenclatural seniority. That is, whichever published source is the first to attach a name to a description becomes the recognized source for that new species. Thus, if the name had leaked out, and a newspaper had published it with enough of a description to be considered valid, the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature, the internationally recognized body governing taxonomy, would have recognized the newspaper as the official description, not the one prepared by the scientists. Now the official description is out and can be downloaded for free by anyone with a connection to the internet.

The name *tumpara* comes from the word for tarsier in the local dialect of Siau Island. In fact, locals are *Orang Sangihe* and speak a dialect of *Bahasa Sangihe*, and while tarsiers

are known as *senggasi* or *higo* on Sangihe Island, they are most often referred to as *tumpara* on Siau Island, according to information collected from the discovery team. In this day and age, naming new species has become big business. Names are sometimes auctioned off for thousands of dollars, or are given in recognition of wealthy donors. Thus, the people of Siau Island and North Sulawesi should feel a special honor that the authors of the description of *Tarsius tumpara* resisted the temptation to attract money for more research, and named the species in honor of the local people and their traditions. It is hoped that by doing so, the local people on Siau Island will take greater pride in their tarsiers and help in the effort to preserve them for posterity.

Read the description of *Tarsius tumpara*:

<http://www.primate-sg.org/PDF/PC23.tarsius.tumpara.pdf>

Read why it is one of the 25 Most Endangered Primates:

<http://www.primate-sg.org/siau07.htm>

Read about the highly dangerous volcano, Mt. Karengetang:

<http://www.volcano.si.edu/world/volcano.cfm?vnum=0607-02=>

Learn more about tarsiers:

<http://www.tarsier.org/>

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