

News release



30 October 2018

New species of Swallowtail butterfly discovered in Fiji

A spectacular new butterfly species has been discovered on the Pacific Island of Vanua Levu in Fiji. The species, named last week as *Papilio natewa* after the Natewa Peninsula where it was found, is a remarkable discovery in a location where butterfly wildlife was thought to be well known.

The large Swallowtail was first photographed in 2017 by Australian ornithologist Greg Kerr, working with Operation Wallacea, an international organisation which supports school students in science projects.



Papilio natewa. Photo © Greg Kerr

Specialists around the world were puzzled when the photograph was sent for identification. It was not until earlier this year, during a second fieldtrip to Fiji, that it was confirmed as a species new to science by John Tennent, Honorary Associate at Oxford University Museum of Natural History, and Scientific Associate of the Natural History Museum, London.

“For such an unusual and large new butterfly to be discovered somewhere we thought was so well known is remarkable,” said John Tennent, who is a Pacific butterfly specialist. The species was named by Tennent and colleagues in Fiji and Australia in a paper published this month in *Entomologischer Verein Apollo*.



Photo © John Tennent / Chris Müller

Tennent has spent long periods in the Pacific, including the Solomon Islands and eastern Papua New Guinea and has found and named over a hundred

new species and subspecies of butterflies in the last 25 years. But he describes the new Natewa Swallowtail as “easily the most spectacular”. The find is especially remarkable because there are only two Swallowtail butterfly species previously known from this part of the Pacific.

“Because they are large, conspicuous and often beautiful in appearance, Swallowtail butterflies have been intensively studied for over 150 years,” says James Hogan, manager of butterfly (Lepidoptera) collections at Oxford University Museum of Natural History. “To find a new species like this, not only in a small and reasonably well-studied area like Fiji, but also one which looks unlike any other Swallowtail is truly exceptional. For John Tennent, Greg Kerr and the rest of the team this really is a once-in-a-lifetime discovery.”

The Natewa Swallowtail has remained undiscovered for so long perhaps due to its habits and the geological history of the islands. Unusually for a Swallowtail, it seems to be a true forest species, spending most of its life inside the forest at elevations above 250 metres, on land with restrict access rights.

“It does make you wonder what else awaits discovery in the world’s wild places. The key to finding new and interesting things is simply to go and look,” adds Tennant.

Notes

An online version of this story is available on the Oxford University Museum of Natural History blog, More than a Dodo, at: <https://wp.me/p3ZpQm-2iy>

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Notes to editors

About the Museum of Natural History

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Founded in 1860 as the centre for scientific study at the University of Oxford, the Museum of Natural History now holds the University's internationally significant collections of entomological, geological and zoological specimens. Housed in a stunning Pre-Raphaelite-inspired example of neo-Gothic architecture, the Museum's growing collections underpin a broad programme of natural environment research, teaching and public engagement.

In 2015, the Museum was a **Finalist in the Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year**. In 2016, it won the top accolade, Best of the Best, in the **Museums + Heritage Awards**.

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