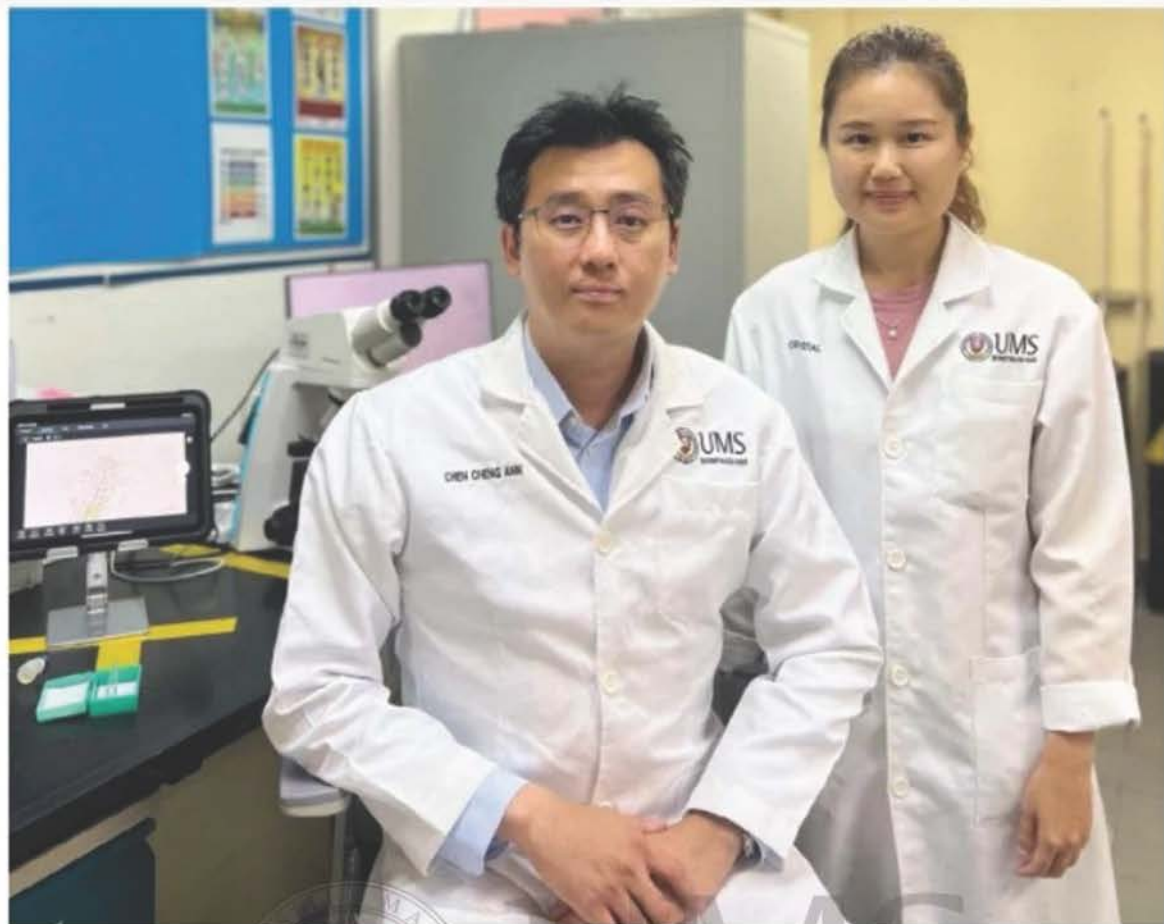




Assoc Prof Dr ChengAnn Chen (left) and Ng WeiLing.

UMS researchers discover new marine tardigrade species in Labuan

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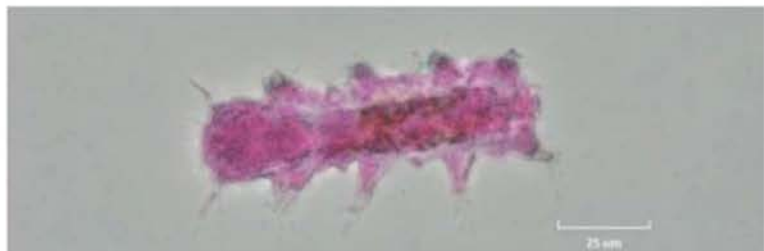
KOTA KINABALU: Borneo Marine Research Institute (BMRI), Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) announces the discovery of a new marine tardigrade species, *Batillipes malaysianus*, found along the shores of Labuan.

Lead researcher Associate Professor Dr Cheng-Ann Chen said the discovery stems from field surveys conducted on 29 November 2023 and 16 September 2024 (Malaysia Day).

He said the breakthrough represents Malaysia's first update on marine tardigrades in more than 50 years and underscores the country's status as a global biodiversity hotspot.

"We dedicate both the discovery and the naming of *Batillipes malaysianus* in celebration of Malaysia's 68th Independence Day.

"Although these animals were extremely scarce, the diagnostic characters we observed confirmed that this is new to science," Dr Chen said.



Batillipes malaysianus sp. nov., Malaysia's newly named marine 'water bear.'

The findings were published in the *Journal of the Marine Biological Association of the United Kingdom* in June this year.

Across two sampling trips, the team found very low densities of marine tardigrades. Among six individuals of the genus *Batillipes*, one was recognised as a species new to science and later formally described as *Batillipes malaysianus*.

The study also reports, for the first time in Malaysia, the presence of *Batillipes rotundiculus*. The type material is deposited in the Borneo Marine

Research Institute's collection for permanent scientific reference.

The research was led by Dr Chen (BMRI, UMS) with postgraduate student Ng Wei-Ling (BMRI, UMS), in collaboration with a researcher from Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) and Prof Dr Tadashi Kajita (University of the Ryukyus, Japan).

Dr Chen recommends expanded coastal surveys together with modern molecular approaches such as environmental DNA (eDNA) to reveal the true extent of Malaysia's microscopic marine diversity.