

## UMS discovers new horn-like fungal species in Danum Valley

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A close-up image showing the physical structure of the newly discovered fungal species *Pleurocordyceps cornusynnemata*, which resembles horns. The discovery, the first of its kind in the world, was recorded by the UMS research team in Danum Valley. PIC COURTESY OF UMS

KOTA KINABALU: Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) has discovered a new fungal species resembling horns in the Danum Valley Conservation Area, Lahad Datu.

The species, named *Pleurocordyceps cornusynnemata*, has been confirmed as the first of its kind in the world following its publication in the international taxonomy journal *Phytotaxa* yesterday.

Associate Professor Dr Jaya Seelan Sathiya Seelan, who led the team from the UMS Institute for Tropical Biology and Conservation (IBTP), said the new species is distinguished by its horn-like physical structure, setting it apart from 26 other species within the *Pleurocordyceps* genus previously found only in China, Thailand and Japan.

"In addition to this global first discovery, our team also recorded two other fungal species, *Pleurocordyceps aurantiaca* and *Pleurocordyceps nipponica*, which are being reported in Malaysia for the first time," he said in a statement here today.

Jaya was assisted by two postgraduate students, Muhammad Shahbaz and Firdza Zulkarnain Mohadden, as well as citizen scientist Elyse Yang, who co-discovered the new species with the team during fieldwork at the Infapro area in Danum Valley.

The study also involved collaboration with experts from Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM), namely Dr Yap Jing Wei and PhD student Jeremiah Sia Yiao Rong.

UMS vice-chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Kasim Mansor said the achievement reflects the university's commitment to realising its "Brain of Borneo" aspiration in elevating the state's natural heritage to the global stage.

"It proves that our local scientists possess high-level expertise to lead impactful research that captures the attention of the international scientific community," he said.

IBTP director Assoc Prof Dr Fiffy Hanisdah Saikim said the success is the result of strong capacity-building among young researchers, noting that Sabah's tropical rainforests still hold many undiscovered species.

The study was supported by the UMSGREAT research grant, with collaboration from the Sabah Forestry Department and Yayasan Sabah under the 12th Malaysia Plan project.

The unique specimen is now preserved at the BORNEENSIS collection centre at IBTP UMS for future scientific reference.