ASIA NEWS Today

UMS DISCOVERS NEW FUNGUS SPECIES AT INFAPRO RAINFOREST REHABILITATION SITE



KOTA KINABALU, Sept 7 (Bernama) — A team of Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) researchers has discovered a new species of entomopathogenic fungus, Acanthomyces infaproensis sp. nov., at the INFAPRO Rainforest Rehabilitation Project site near the Danum Valley Conservation Area in Lahad Datu.

UMS said in a statement today that the discovery demonstrated the potential of restored forest areas as important habitats for biodiversity, including species yet to be scientifically documented.

The species was found infecting adult moths attached to the underside of leaves at the INFAPRO site, with two specimens collected on March 12, 2024.

"Both specimens then underwent morphological examination and molecular phylogenetic analysis using five genetic markers, which showed that they formed a distinct lineage, supporting the recognition of the fungus as a new species," the statement said.

UMS said the species was named infaproensis after the INFAPRO Rainforest Rehabilitation Project, where it was discovered, and is so far known only from the site near the Danum Valley Conservation Area.

The study, published in the international taxonomic journal Phytotaxa on Aug 28, involved UMS researchers Muhammad Shahbaz, Chong Chuan Cheak and Associate Professor Dr Jaya Seelan Sathiya Seelan, as well as Ibrahem Ghani Wasti of Kolej Universiti Yayasan Sabah and Dr Yap Sau Wai of Yayasan Sabah.

Meanwhile, UMS Institute for Tropical Biology and Conservation (IBTP) director Associate Professor Dr Fiffy Hanisdah Saikim said the discovery underscored the importance of biodiversity research in generating knowledge that could benefit not only the scientific community but also conservation efforts and future innovation.

"Every new species we discover is a reminder that we have yet to fully understand the richness of biodiversity in Sabah. More importantly, this discovery occurred in a restored forest.

"This sends a very strong message that investing in ecosystem restoration is not just about restoring trees and landscapes, but also about rebuilding living spaces, ecological processes and opportunities for biodiversity to flourish again," she said.

Meanwhile, UMS vice-chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Kasim Mansor said the discovery was particularly significant as IBTP celebrates its 30th anniversary this year, marking three decades of contributions to biodiversity research and conservation in Borneo.

"The discovery of Acanthomyces infaproensis demonstrates that this journey continues to generate new knowledge that is important not only to Sabah and Malaysia, but also to the global scientific community.

"UMS will continue to strengthen its role as a leader in biodiversity research and knowledge in Borneo, sharing knowledge from Borneo with the world while ensuring this natural treasure is preserved for future generations," he said.

The holotype specimen of Acanthomyces infaproensis, numbered BORH(EF)00008, is now deposited in the BORNEENSIS Collection at IBTP, UMS, as a reference for future taxonomic and biodiversity research.

–BERNAMA