



Press release – 16 January 2017

### **A rabbit-eared beetle, species of the year 2017 of the SSS**

There are now 1.5 million known species of animal and plant in the world, but specialists estimate that the true number is actually between 10 and 100 times as many. Every year, several thousand species are discovered and described in scientific publications.

Switzerland is not getting left behind in this adventure; no fewer than 153 species were described by researchers working in Swiss institutions in 2016 alone. Among these, the Swiss Systematics Society has elected *Colilodion schulzi* species of the year 2017!

"Obviously, these are not really ears," says Giulio Cuccodoro, an entomologist at the Museum of Natural History of the city of Geneva and co-author of this new species. "These are antennae that have a strange enlarged form. Perhaps these "ears" are actually the result of an astonishing adaptation to their lifestyle: these beetles are myrmecophil, i.e. they live in anthills among the ants. The ants transport them to their nests, and the compact shape of the antennae may provide better resistance to avoid "breakage" during this transport. "

"We still do not fully understand the ecology of these species," continues Giulio. "With my Chinese colleague Zi-Wei Yin, I have studied these unknown insects that live on the ground in tropical forests with interest: they are so small (*Colilodion schulzi* barely three millimeters) that their diversity has been underestimated. Seven of the eight known species of "rabbit beetles" have been described by researchers at the Geneva Museum, and six are represented only in the museum's scientific collection, most by a single individual. "

For more information about the SSS: see below and the website [www.swiss-systematics.ch](http://www.swiss-systematics.ch)

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#### About SSS:

Since 2005 the Swiss Systematics Society (SSS) brings together researchers who study the diversity of living things, a science called systematics. Its purpose is to make an inventory of all animal and plant species (extant and extinct, including fossil species), to describe them, to give them a name and classify them, and to study their relationships over time (phylogeny) and in space (biogeography). The SSS presents on its web pages the list of species described by researchers working in Swiss institutions since 2015: [New Species Switzerland](#). These include all sorts of organisms, from all over

the world; from small unicellular animals of the Jura marshes to Peruvian grasses and extinct species known only by their fossils. Insects are well represented as they are one of the most diverse groups in the world, and one of the least well known.

153 species, compared to the thousands yet to be discovered, may not seem much ... but each one represents several years work, most involving cutting-edge techniques such as electron microscopy or analysis of genetic material. One of the objectives of the SSS is to make this patient work more widely known, and to do this we have chosen to highlight one of the species described in 2016. Our ambassador species for 2017, *Colilodion schulzi*, is a new species of beetle from the Philippines described by a Swiss-Chinese team. With some 400,000 known species, beetles alone account for nearly 30% of the animal diversity and millions more are yet to be discovered: there is still some work on the plate of the systematicians!

The SSS is a member of the Biology Platform of the Swiss Academy of Natural Sciences.