ZSI scientists, Kalyani varsity and German inst discover beetle species

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KRISHNAGAR, 1 NOVEMBER

A team of scientists from the Zoological Survey of India, University of Kalyani and Alexander Koenig Leibniz Institute (Bonn, Germany) has unveiled a precious gift for the City of Joy.

This enthusiastic group, comprising Debika Bhunia, Devanshu Gupta, Subhankar Kumar Sarkar and Dirk Ahrens has identified a new phytophagous beetle species from Behala, Kolkata, aptly named Maladera kolkataensis Bhunia, Gupta, Sarkar, and Ahrens 2023, after its place of discovery.

The remarkable find, now preserved at the National Zoological Collection of Zoological Survey of India, Kolkata, is reminiscent of an unpolished diamond waiting to be discovered.

This newly-discovered beetle, along with 21 other previously unknown records from Bihar and Bengal, was recently documented in the prestigious international journal "Zootaxa."

Debika Bhunia, the first author of the article and a research fellow at the Zoological Survey of India and University of Kalyani, expressed her excitement about the discovery.

She emphasized the importance of the find in the context of India's rich biodiversity. Ms Bhunia played a pivotal role in the research.

The director of Zoological Survey of India, Dr Dhriti Banerjee, shared her optimism, stating, "Biodiversity is not diminishing; there is hope, and the measures taken by the ministry of environment, forest and climate change (MOEFCC) are bearing fruit."

Dr Banerjee underscored the relevance of the study, especially for the lower Gangetic plains, a crucial agricultural region.

She pointed out that these beetles, while not reported as significant pests, are closely related to major agricultural pests, making the study vital for agricultural research.

Dr Devanshu Gupta, the incharge of the Coleoptera section at Zoological Survey of India, elaborated on the significance of museum specimens in such discoveries.

He highlighted that many new taxa emerge from these preserved specimens, akin to unpolished diamonds waiting to be recognized.

He also emphasized that Maladera kolkataensis Bhunia, Gupta, Sarkar, and Ahrens 2023 would contribute substantially to India's entomofauna, strengthening the knowledge of this insect group's fauna and taxonomy.

Dr. Subhankar Kumar Sarkar, professor of zoology at University of Kalyani, noted that there are 4,500 described species of the tribe Sericini worldwide, with 682 reported from India. Most of these Indian species hail from the Himalayan and Southern regions.

This groundbreaking discovery not only enriches India's biodiversity but also underscores the significance of preserving museum specimens for future scientific exploration.