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Rediscovery of *Biswamoyopterus* (Mammalia: Rodentia: Sciuridae: Pteromyini) in Asia, with the description of a new species from Lao PDR

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Abstract

A new species of the flying squirrel genus *Biswamoyopterus* is described from Lao PDR. It is based on a single specimen collected from a local food market at Ban Thongnami, Pak Kading District, Bolikhamxai Province. The new taxon shows close affinities to *Biswamoyopterus biswasi*, which is only known from the holotype collected in 1981, 1250 km from the current locality, in Arunachal Pradesh, Northeast India. However, it differs substantially in pelage colour, most particularly on the ventral surfaces of the body, patagia, tail membrane, and tail. The single specimen was found in an area of central Lao PDR, which is characterised by its extensive limestone karst formations and which is home to other rare endemic rodents, including the Kha-nyou (*Laonastes aenigmamus*) and the Lao limestone rat (*Saxatilomys paulinae*).

Key words: Southeast Asia, flying squirrel, taxonomy, bush meat

Introduction

In March–May, 1981, Dr. Shyamrup Biswas of the Zoological Survey India collected a unique flying squirrel from a proposed biosphere reserve in Namdapha, Tirap District, Arunachal Pradesh, India. It was subsequently described as a new genus and species, *Biswamoyopterus biswasi* Saha (1981), the Namdapha flying squirrel.

Information about this taxon was summarised in a series of publications including Corbet and Hill (1992), Thorington and Hoffmann (2005), Thorington *et al.* (2012), and the species was listed as Critically Endangered in the IUCN Red List (Molur 2008). However, until now, the genus was only known from the holotype specimen (Reg. No. 20705) which resides in the Zoological Collection of the Zoological Survey of India, Kolkata [Calcutta], India.

In September 2012, a team from the National University of Laos undertook a survey of flying squirrels in the informal food markets of northern, central and southern Lao PDR. In the market at Ban (village) Thongnami, Pak Kading District, Bolikhamxai Province, central Lao PDR (Fig. 1), they observed several species of Pteromyini including *Hylopetes phayrei* Blyth, *Petaurista elegans* Müller, and *P. philippensis* Elliot for sale as ‘bush-meat’. In addition, there was a female specimen of a large flying squirrel, which superficially resembled *P. philippensis* but differed in a number of external characters. On subsequent examination in the university museum, this individual was also found to have cranial and dental characters that clearly differentiated it not just from *P. philippensis* but from the genus *Petaurista* itself.

A review of the literature confirmed that it was referable to the elusive genus *Biswamoyopterus* but that it differed specifically from *B. biswasi*. Therefore, it is described here as a new species to science, the second record of the genus, and the first record of the genus from Lao PDR and Southeast Asia.