

“You have just taken your first step into a larger world”

OBI-WAN KENOBI, *Star Wars: A New Hope*

New data on chewing lice includes discovery of new “Darth Vader” species



New data about chewing lice has been published today in the Open Access journal *Parasite*. As well as two species being designated as their specimen type, and new host-lice associations supported by an updated geographical distribution, a new species has been discovered. It has been named *Ricinus vaderi* after Darth Vader the villainous character in *Star Wars* because of the similarity between the head of the louse and Darth Vader’s helmet.

Ricinus, is the largest genus of chewing lice found on parasitizing perching birds of the order *Passeriformes*. The three authors of the study, Miroslav Valan, Oldrich Sychra and Ivan Literak of the University of Veterinary and Pharmaceutical Sciences, Brno, Czech Republic carried out the studies on 107 specimens of 10 species at the Zoological Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Saint Petersburg, Russia. These specimens are part of a larger collection, mainly assembled by Dimitri Iwanowitsch Blagoveshtchensky in the 1930s through the 1970s. He published several surveys on the biodiversity of chewing lice in the former USSR.

Miroslav Valan, one of the authors of the report says, “we are excited by our new discoveries outlined in this paper, there is no doubt that descriptions of new species and new host-lice records are to be expected, therefore examining museum collections and revising material deposited worldwide is necessary to obtain more data concerning geographical distribution, biodiversity, and host associations of chewing lice.” Valan went on to say, “data about the biodiversity of chewing lice within the former USSR has been published mainly in Russian and existing literature is not easily accessible. We have reported only on those records we have been able to verify, but as well as the discovery of *R. vaderi*, we include new country records for Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan”.

Jean-Lou Justine, Editor in Chief of *Parasite* commented, “this updated data should be of interest to a broad readership including those interested in parasitology, host-parasite associations, entomology, morphology, taxonomy and systematics of the Phthiraptera order. Furthermore, Blagoveshtchensky reported on more species specimens than were found in this collection, we hope that this research means these lost samples will be found in the future – and hopefully not in a galaxy far, far away!”

This paper is published in *Parasite* is available in English with English and French abstracts and is free to read. Please follow this link <http://dx.doi.org/10.1051/parasite/2016007> to read the full article.