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Singapore

Rare live colony of 'T. rex' ants discovered in Singapore: Report



A T. rex ant. (Image: Mark Wong and Gordon Yong / Asian Myrmecology)

SINGAPORE: An extremely rare ant has been seen alive for the first time in more than a decade, living in the dirt of Singapore's Mandai area, according to a report by National Geographic.

National Geographic Young Explorer and entomologist Mark Wong and his colleague Gordon Yong, an entomologist at the National University of Singapore (NUS), stumbled across the first recorded live colony of *Tyrannomyrmex rex* (*T. rex*) ants in March 2016 while surveying the forested Mandai area, said the May 16 report.

Named after the huge carnivorous dinosaur *Tyrannosaurus rex*, *T. rex* ants has previously eluded scientists, with only a handful of deceased ants found since 2003, according to National Geographic.

But unlike the dinosaur it was named after, these ants demonstrated a "timid" behaviour during the entomologists' experiments. When intimidated, the ants "typically curled their head and gaster inwards and under their legs and mesothorax", remaining motionless until the aggressor moved on, noted Mr Wong and Mr Yong in their description of their discovery in the scientific journal *Asian Myrmecology*.

In an experiment to try and determine the ants' diet, the entomologists found that the ants also ran away when faced with items of "prey".

"I had a good laugh when I saw them respond in this manner to little millipedes, mites, smaller ants, and basically whatever prey I tried to offer them," Mr Wong told National Geographic.

"They wouldn't even get close to honey—and only gently prodded (a) honey droplet with their antennae."

However, when a male pupa emerged as an adult ant two days into the colony's captivity, his fellow ants ate him - an act that left the researchers puzzled.

More of these ants will help in their research, but Mr Wong and Mr Yong have not been able to find another colony, despite returning to the same area, the report noted.

Source: CNA/nc