MORPHOLOGY AND GENETIC VARIATIONS OF *Aethalops* (CHIROPTERA: PTEROPODIDAE) USING MITOCHONDRIAL AND NUCLEAR GENES

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Master of Science
2010
Morphology and Genetic Variations of *Aethalops* (Chiroptera: Pteropodidae) using Mitochondrial and Nuclear Genes

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A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

Faculty of Resource Science and Technology
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK
2010
DECLARATION

I hereby declare that no portion of the work referred to this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification to this or any other university or institute of higher learning.

__________________________
(Roberta Chaya Tawie anak Tingga)

APRIL 2010
Acknowledgements

Praise the Man above that I’ve made this far and guiding me all through the way in my life by giving me faith, determination and strength physically, emotionally and mentally. First of all, I would like to extend my greatest gratitude to my supervisor Professor Dr Mohd Tajuddin Abdullah @ Mr T for all the great knowledge and experiences that he had shared and taught me for the past six years in UNIMAS. Thank you also to Mr T for giving me the wonderful opportunity to further my Master degree and giving me advice, constructive comments, guidance, concern and supports endlessly in this study. I would also like to thank Dr Ramlah Zainuddin for her knowledge that she had given to me in order to fulfill this thesis especially in population genetics analyses and also for her support and encouragement continuously. This study would not have been possible without the various financial support and supportive administration from UNIMAS, including a scholarship Zamalah UNIMAS 2008/10 that was awarded to me. This study was also funded under grant FRGS 06(08)6602007(25) lead by MTA. I would like to thank the Sarawak Forestry Corporation and Sarawak Forestry Department for the permission with license number 07412 under the State Wild Life Protection Rules 1998 to work at protected areas with research permit number NPW.907.4.2(III)-3 and permit to enter park number 3/2008. My thanks also go to Sabah Park for permitting me to collect samples in Sabah, Institute of Biodiversity (IBD) Krau, Pahang and Department of Wildlife and National Park (DWNP) for allowing me to collect samples in Peninsular Malaysia.

My appreciation is also extended to all our members in Department of Zoology, namely, Mr Besar Ketol, Mr Isa Sait, Mr Huzal Irwan Husin, Mr Wahap Marni, Mr Jalani Mortada,
Madam Wan Nurainie Wan Ismail, Mr Trevor Allen and Mr Nasron Ahmad for their hard
work and assistance throughout this study. Not to forget to all Molecular Ecology Laboratory
(MEL) seniors, namely, Miss Noor Haliza Hasan, Mr Andy Kho Han Guan, Miss Fong Pooi
Har, Mr Jayaraj Vijaya Kumaran, and Miss Siti Nuryldia Sazali for guiding me all the way,
pointing out my mistakes and non-stop sharing their knowledge with me especially in this
study. To Mr Faisal Anwarali Khan, not only as a senior, but as a friend and a big brother to
me in UNIMAS, I thank you from the start in lighting me up to be working in the field of
zoology when I was in undergraduate, continuously giving supports and advices to me in my
study and matters in real life.

To all MEL colleagues, Institute of Biodiversity and Environmental Conservation (IBEC) and
Zoology members, I thank you all too for being such beautiful, supportive and caring friends;
Eileen Lit, Noor Haliza Hasan, Mohd Ridwan Rahman, Eric Pui Yong Min, Muhd Ikhwan
Idris, Sigit Wiantoro, Anang Setiawan Achmadi, Mohd Fizl Sidq Mohd Ramji, Madinah
Adrus, Nur Aida Tamrin, Nor Salmizar Azmi, Mohd Isham Azhar, Nurhaika Atikah Amin,
Mohd Hanif Redzuan, Zahirunisa Rahim, Pang Sing Tyan, Irene, Christha and Debby. To
my most dearest friends, more like sisters to me; Eileen Lit, Anusyah Rathakrishnan, Mona
Octavia Sulai Alban Mellings, Sujanuriah Sahidi and Diomira George, thanks for the
priceless friendship, the endless support, caring and encouragement given to me especially
when I was down, the sweet memories and hardships we all had been through together.

My biggest gratitude is to my beloved parents, Tingga Tawie and Pauline Punai Sandai for
believing in me, the endless supports, encouragement, love and prayers. To my loving
brothers, Lendl Tawie and Aaron Empenit Tawie, thank you for being loving and supportive
brothers to me. Again, I thank you to my family for always being there for me. Without my family, I would not have gone and achieved this far in my life. This thesis I dedicated the most to my beloved family.
ABSTRACT

*Aethalops* is a mountain endemic fruit bat which consists of two species, namely, *Aethalops aequalis* and *A. alecto*. *A. aequalis* is endemic in Borneo only whereas *A. alecto* can be found on islands in Indonesia and also in Peninsular Malaysia. *A. aequalis* was previously classified as subspecies to *A. alecto* however, most recent study on *Aethalops* suggested *A. aequalis* as a single unit species distinctly different from *A. alecto*. Two approaches used in this study which were molecular and morphometric techniques. The objectives of this study were to clarify the current taxonomic status of *A. aequalis* and its phylogenetic relationship with *A. alecto*. Populations of *A. aequalis* in Sabah and Sarawak were investigated to detect any genetic variation between the geographic groups and among populations. This study also aimed to determine any morphological variation among the populations and to investigate if morphological variations correlate with molecular genetic distant. The fourth aim of this study was to provide as many data or information that could assist in the conservation management of *Aethalops* in Borneo specifically as this species is endemic mountain bat. Individuals in this study were sampled from seven populations in Sabah and Sarawak. Altogether, there were 70 individuals obtained from fresh samples and voucher specimens. They were categorised into three groups, namely, Southwest Sarawak (Mount [Mt] Penrissen and Mt Pueh), Northeast Sarawak (Mt Murud, Mt Mulu and Bario) and Sabah (Mt Kinabalu and Mt Trus Madi). For morphometric analysis, 65 skulls of adult *A. aequalis* were extracted with 22 cranial and dental characters measured and recorded. Mitochondrial (COI) and nuclear (Rag2) DNA genes were used in this study to infer the genetic variation of *A. aequalis* by applying DNA sequencing technique whereas conserved gene 12S rRNA was used to infer phylogenetic relationships of *Aethalops* from Sundaland. Analyses of results
were interpreted for within and among group variations. Discriminant Function Analysis (DFA) results showed little variation was detected in morphology of Malaysian *A. aequalis*. Characters of distance between lower canine and lower molar (CM1) and distance between lower incisor and lower molar (IM1) were the two strongest characters to discriminate *A. aequalis*. Differences in CM1 (indicating the length of lower jaw) showed a separation between Northeast Sarawak and Sabah (Northern part of Borneo) and Southwest Sarawak groups. Populations from lower elevation mountain at Southwest Sarawak have a longer lower jaw. Longer lower jaw can be related to feeding behavior of the fruit bat. Mt Mulu population showed significant differences in all characters against populations in Mt Penrissen, Mt Kinabalu, Mt Trus Madi and Mt Murud. Morphology differences were suggested to be influenced by the food resources in the environment. Phylogenetic analyses results showed that there was an interspecific genetic divergence in *Aethalops*, separated into two main groups which were *A. alecto* and *A. aequalis*. Using 12S rRNA, Kalimantan population was detected as the possible ancestral population of *A. aequalis* in Borneo. Highly significant genetic differences of *A. aequalis* between populations in Kalimantan and Malaysia Borneo suggested a possibility of two subspecies in Borneo. Both mitochondrial (12S rRNA and COI) and nuclear (Rag2) genes produced unresolved phylogenetic trees at population level. There was little genetic divergence and high gene flow detected among the observed populations in Sabah and Sarawak. However, each of the inferred genes were able to detect that there was a clear pattern in separation time of divergence between Southwest Sarawak and Northeast Sarawak and Sabah groups. It was predicted the population of Malaysian Borneo started from the Southwest Sarawak after diverging from Kalimantan population, then dispersed into Northern part of Borneo during the Pleistocene period. Molecular findings also showed incongruence results with morphological difference between
Mt Mulu and other populations. Overall, *A. aequalis* was a single panmictic population. A single unit of ESUs with two potentially MUs was defined for proper management of conserving this species. Two possible MUs were suggested for populations from Mt Penrissen and Bario that acquire immediate conservation population in future studies with more adequate amount of samples representing each populations. Both of these populations were genetically different from other populations and also were suspected as an ancestral population for *A. aequalis* in Malaysia Borneo based from the preliminary findings. Therefore, it is very important to retain the ancestral haplotype from this population for genetic management purposes in Sarawak. However, more sufficient samples of *A. aequalis* are required to further verify the MUs in Sabah and Sarawak. Current findings on the abundance, morphology and genetic data of *A. aequalis* can be used as baseline information for the conservation and proper management on this species and habitats related to its survival.

Keywords: *A. aequalis, A. alecto*, population genetics, morphometric, mitochondrial and nuclear DNA, phylogenetic relationship, genetic variation, ESUs
Analisis Morfologi dan Genetik Variasi Aethalops (Chiroptera: Pteropodidae)
Menggunakan Mitokondria dan Nuklear Gen

ABSTRAK

dengan kumpulan Timur Laut Sarawak. Selepas berpisah dari populasi Kalimantan, populasi *A. aequalis* Borneo Malaysia dijangkakan bahawa berasal dari Timur Laut Sarawak, dan tersebar ke bahagian Utara Borneo semasa peristiwa 'Pleistocene'. Kajian ini menunjukkan hasil analisa morfologi tidak memberi corak pembahagian kumpulan yang sama dengan hasil analisa molekular. Secara keseluruhan, *A. aequalis* diklasifikasi sebagai satu unit 'panmitic'. Species *A. aequalis* dikelaskan sebagai satu unit 'Evolutionary Significant Units (ESUs)' dengan dua potensi unit 'Management Unit (MUs)' telah dikenalpasti sebagai langkah pengurusan teratur untuk pemuliharaan species *A. aequalis*. Gunung Penrissen dan Bario telah berpotensi dikenali sebagai ke 'MU' agar pemuliharaan species ini dijalankan secara berasingan dengan sampel individu lebih banyak untuk mewakili populasi tersebut. Kedua-dua populasi tersebut mempunyai perbezaan genetik variasi yang jauh berbeza berbanding dengan populasi – populasi yang lain dan diramal sebagai susur-galur kepada semua populasi di Sabah dan Sarawak, berdasarkan penemuan awal dalam kajian ini. Jadi, ia amatlah penting untuk mengekalkan 'haplotype' keturunan dari populasi ini. Lebih banyak sampel diperlukan dalam kajian yang akan datang untuk pengenalpastian yang selanjutnya. Segala maklumat mengenai kelimpahan, morfologi dan genetik *A. aequalis* akan digunakan sebagai data asas dalam pemeliharaan serta panduan untuk pengurusan yang sistematik bagi spesis *A. aequalis* dengan habitat yang berkenaan untuk kemandirian kelawar ini.

Kata Kunci: *A. aequalis, A. alecto, genetik populasi, morfometrik, mitokondrial dan nuklear DNA, hubungan filogenetik, genetik variasi, 'ESUs'"
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