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ASIA EDITION

Scientists make historic discovery about corals

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Singapore: An international research team has discovered that a species of coral called Stylophora pistillata is in fact composed of four distinct species, rather than being just one speices as originally assumed. The team applied a DNA barcoding technique to examine 241 S. pistillata samples collected from four diverse areas of sea.

Among about 1,000 species of coral found around the world, Stylophora pistillata commonly known as "hood coral" has been the most popular research target over the past 40 years. S. pistillata is widely distributed over sub-tropical and tropical waters including the Pacific and the Indian Oceans, the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf.

The full article entitled "DNA barcoding reveals the coral 'laboratory-rat', Stylophora pistillata encompasses multiple identities", has been published in Scientific Reports.

The team, composed of scholars from 13 countries, was led by Dr Allen Chen, research fellow at the Biodiversity Research Center, Academia Sinica, Taiwan. This finding alters understanding of the taxonomy of hood coral and means that coral biology research using S. pistillata needs to be revisited.

Dr Allen Chen said that this is the first time the coral researchers worldwide have worked together on the global genetic diversity of coral using a DNA barcoding technique. Most of samples used in this study were obtained with great effort through cooperation, he added. This research highlights the necessity for further research on this species as well as similar species from other genera in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean to uncover the mysteries surrounding the evolution of coral species. The outcome of this paper may also contribute to coral conservation efforts.