

Invitation to the Seminar series in Evolutionary Biology

Tuesday, 22. September 2026

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Sulawesi tarsiers - where did they come from, where did they go? Insights from phylogeography

Abstract:

Eastern tarsiers (*Tarsius*) are small nocturnal primates endemic to Sulawesi and its surrounding islands. While originally classified as a single species, subsequent morphological, acoustic, and genetic analyses have delineated *Tarsius* into 12 currently described species: one mountain lineage, six lowland mainland lineages, and five island-endemic species. Despite the evolutionary significance of this system, genetic data remains sparse, leaving phylogenetic relationships unresolved. Tarsiers likely colonized Sulawesi via dispersal during the early Miocene, subsequently undergoing complex patterns of speciation and secondary contact driven by the region's dynamic geological history. This research aims to understand how the transition from an ancient archipelago system to the current continuous landmass in Sulawesi fostered rapid diversification within this unique lineage. To achieve this, we use a multidisciplinary approach combining paleogeographic reconstructions and MIG-seq sequencing data to estimate ancestral ranges of mainland species, analyses of intraspecific variation, and historical DNA from century-old museum specimens from smaller surrounding islands. This comprehensive approach enables us to shed light on the complex evolutionary history of this remarkable primate. I look forward to introducing you to the world of tarsiers and Southeast Asian rainforests, providing a unique window into the past.

The colloquium usually takes place on Tuesdays at 12:15 pm until approx. 1:15 pm in the BZ 1 lecture hall (HS 00.187). Talks are given in English. Everyone interested is welcome!