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Auction to Name Fish Species Nets \$2 Million for Conservation

By [Juliet Eilperin](#)Washington Post Staff Writer
Saturday, September 22, 2007; Page A07

MONTE CARLO, Monaco, Sept. 20 -- An auction of rights to name 10 newly discovered species of fish raised more than \$2 million for conservation efforts in eastern [Indonesia](#) on Thursday night, setting a record for an event of its type.

The black-tie soiree, hosted by Prince Albert II and sponsored by [Conservation International](#) and the Monaco-Asia Society, featured species found last year in the Bird's Head Seascape, an area in the northwest corner of Indonesian Papua. Prices for the naming rights ranged from \$500,000 for a Hemiscyllium shark from Cendrawasih Bay to \$50,000 for the Pseudanthias fairy basslet. The identities of the winning bidders, and the names they chose, were not immediately disclosed.

The idea of selling new species' naming rights has gained popularity among environmentalists. Two years ago, the [Wildlife Conservation Society](#) raised \$650,000 in a one-week Internet auction of a newly identified Bolivian monkey, but the Blue Auction's \$2,015,000 take was the most for a single event.

The proceeds will fund initiatives such as a floating ranger station in the partially protected Bird's Head Seascape and educational trips for the region's children.

"Two million dollars is an enormous shot in the arm for the community that lives in Raja Ampat," said Peter Seligmann, Conservation International's chairman and chief executive. "It's going to provide them with the opportunity for education, for patrolling, for the training of scientists."

[Christie's International](#) auctioneer Hugh Edmeades ran the bidding in [Monaco's](#) Oceanographic Museum, a 97-year-old edifice perched hundreds of feet above the sea. As he called out the opening bid to name a Corythoichthys pipefish, Edmeades approached one bidder in a silky, floor-length gown and prodded her to up the ante.

"Now, you promised me you would go to 60 [thousand]," he told her. When she finally assented, Edmeades cried out, "Sixty thousand dollars! Well, you won't regret it. Not tonight."

Prince Albert, whose foundation also benefited from Thursday's auction, said the event underscored that the ocean contains new possibilities even as it is under threat.

"It gets people focused on the fact that species are still being discovered, yet there are some disappearing that we will never be able to name," he said in an interview.

Bidders had to pledge that they would name the species after people rather than corporate entities. Cherie Nursalim, who, along with her husband, Enki Tan, helped organize the auction and successfully bid on several species for themselves and a few friends, said she and Tan intended to name a fish after their parents.

Apu Suharsono, who directs the research center for oceanography at the Indonesian Institute

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of Sciences, said his government was trying to protect the Bird's Head Seascape from overexploitation because it has such a variety of habitat and marine species.

"It's very rich in diversity," he said of the region, which features nearly 1,300 identified species. "Everything is there."

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Next Thursday, Hugh Edmeades of Christie's auction house will bring down the gavel in Monaco's famed Oceanographic Museum and Aquarium. When he closes the bidding, a sinuous shark recently discovered thousands of miles away in Indonesian waters will have a new scientific name. And hundreds of tho...

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