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(<https://smujo.id/biodiv/issue/view/290>)

Vol. 22 No. 3 (2021)

Full Issue

Front Cover (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/issue/view/290/142>)

Articles

Morphological, molecular and resistance responses to soft-rot disease variability among plantlets of *Phalaenopsis amabilis* regenerated from irradiated protocorms (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7190>)

HALIDA ADISTYA PUTRI, AGUS PURWITO, SUDARSONO, DEWI SUKMA

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7190/4610>)

Agronomic characters, genetic and phenotypic diversity coefficients, and heritability of 12 genotypes of rice
(<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7147>)

JAENUDIN KARTAHADIMAJA, SETYO DWI UTOMO, ERWIN YULIADI, ABDUL KADIR SALAM, WARSONO, ANUNG WAHYUDI

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7147/4611>)

Short Communication: A comparison of stand structure, species diversity and aboveground biomass between natural and planted mangroves in Sikka, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia
(<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7807>)

JERIELS MATATULA, AHMAD YUSUF AFANDI, PANDU YUDHA ADI PUTRA WIRABUANA

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7807/4612>)

The potency of actinomycetes extracts isolated from Pramuka Island, Jakarta, Indonesia as antimicrobial agents
(<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/5964>)

SETIAWATI SETIAWATI, TITIK NURYASTUTI, ETI NURWENING SHOLIKHAH, PUSPITA LISDIYANTI, SYILVIA UTAMI TUNJUNG PRATIWI, TRI RATNA SULISTİYANI, SHANTI RATNAKOMALA; JUMINA, MUSTOFA

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/5964/4613>)

Breed and age effects on concentration of adiponectin and reproductive performance in Anglo Nubian, Etawah grade and its crossbred bucks
(<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7431>)

HAFIZUDDIN, NI WAYAN KURNIANI KARJA, LISA PRAHARANI, MOHAMAD AGUS SETIADI

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7431/4620>)

The genus *Dolichandrone* (Fenzl.) Seem. (Bignoniaceae) in Thailand
(<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7732>)

WEEREESA BOONTHASAK, CHATCHAI NGERNSAENG SARUAY

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7732/4618>)

Diversity of endophytic fungi in *Syzygium aqueum*
(<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/6958>)

UMMI H. HABISUKAN, ELFITA, HARY WIDJAJANTI, ARUM SETIAWAN, ALFIA R. KURNIAWATI

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/6958/4621>)

Genetic diversity in seedling populations of *Dipterocarpus gracilis* in Kecubung Ulolanang Nature Conservation Reserve, Indonesia
(<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7256>)

NESTY PRATIWI ROMADINI, SAPTO INDRIOKO, WIDIYATNO, ENY FARIDAH, YENI W.N. RATNANINGRUM

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7256/4622>)

Correlation and path analysis for agronomic traits contributing to yield in 30 genotypes of soybean (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7454>)

ANNA SATYANA KARYAWATI, ENO SINTHIA VINKY PUSPITANINGRUM

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7454/4623>)

The biological prospective of red-pigmented bacteria cultured from contaminated agar media (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7092>)

ACHMAD ARIFIYANTO, HAPIN AFRIANI, MEISHY HANDERLIN PUTRI, BERLIANA DAMAYANTI, CINDY LUKYTA RATIH RIYANTO

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7092/4624>)

Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) analysis for vegetation cover in Leuser Ecosystem area, Sumatra, Indonesia (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7404>)

ADISTI PERMATASARI PUTRI HARTOYO, ARZYANA SUNKAR, RAHMATULLOH RAMADANI, SYAHLAN FALUTHI, SYAFITRI HIDAYATI

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7404/4625>)

Profile of cryptobrachytone C accumulation in *Cryptocarya pulchrinervia* leaves using MALDI-MSI (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7468>)

JUJUN RATNASARI, RIZKITA RACHMI ESYANTI, MARSELINA IRASONIA TAN, LIA DEWI JULIAWATY, SHUICHI SHIMMA

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7468/4626>)

GC-MS analysis of rhizome ethanol extracts from *Curcuma aeruginosa* accessions and their efficiency activities as anticancer agent (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7900>)

WARAS NURCHOLIS, NURUL KHUMAIDA, MARIA BINTANG, MUHAMAD SYUKUR

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7900/4627>)

Inhibition of α -amylase and α -glucosidase activities in vitro by extracts of selected medicinal plants (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7269>)

DEEPAK RAJ PANT, BIVA ARYAL, DAMA PUN, SUSHILA SHARMA, GIRI PRASAD JOSHI

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7269/4629>)

Combination on endophytic fungal as the Plant Growth-Promoting Fungi (PGPF) on cucumber (*Cucumis sativus*) (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7333>)

SYAMSIA SYAMSIA, ABUBAKAR IDHAN, AMANDA PATAPPARI FIRMANSYAH, NOERFITRYANI NOERFITRYANI, IRADHATULLAH RAHIM, HENRY KESAULYA, RAKHMAD ARMUS

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7333/4630>)

Salinity tolerance of larvae *Aedes aegypti* inland and coastal habitats in Pasangkayu, West Sulawesi, Indonesia (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/6996>)

ARINI RATNASARI, ARIF RAHMAN JABAL, SYAHRIBULAN, IRFAN IDRIS, NUR RAHMA, SRI NUR RAHMI NUR RUSTAM, MILA KARMILA, HAJAR HASAN, ISRA WAHID

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/6996/4631>)

Morpho-physiological changes of four tropical tree seedlings under aluminum stress (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7568>)

CHARTINA PIDJATH, DIDY SOPANDIE, MAMAN TURJAMAN, SRI WILARSO BUDI

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7568/4632>)

The association of follicle stimulating hormone receptor (FSHR) gene polymorphism of on egg productivity in hybrid chicken (*Gallus gallus gallus*, Linnaeus 1758) (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/6944>)

RIKHA RISKI KURNIA, INDRA LESMANA, ADITYA RAHMAN ERNANTO, AYUDHA BAHANA ILHAM PERDAMAIAN, TRIJOKO, BUDI SETIADI DARYONO

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/6944/4633>)

Exploring anticancer activity of wild and polyploid mutant of *Artemisia cina* (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7363>)

SRI KASMIYATI, ELIZABETH B.E. KRISTIANI, MARIA M. HERAWATI, FERDY S. RONDONUWU

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7363/4634>)

Forest cover changes in Indonesia's terrestrial national parks between 2012 and 2017 (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/6965>)

ASRI A. DWIYAHRENI, HABIBURRACHMAN A.H. FUAD, SUNARYO, TRI EDHI BUDHI SOESILO, CHRIS MARGULES, JATNA SUPRIATNA

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/6965/4635>)

Characterization of banana bunchy top virus on Sumatra (Indonesia) wild banana (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7134>)

RUTH FETI RAHAYUNIATI, SEDYO HARTONO, SUSAMTO SOMOWIYARJO, SITI SUBANDIYAH, JOHN E. THOMAS

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7134/4636>)

Culturable endophytic fungal diversity in cassava tubers of Indonesia (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7511>)

ANASTASIA TATIK HARTANTI, FELICIA NIKE SUSANTI, VIVITRI DEWI PRASASTY, NANI RADIASTUTI

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7511/4637>)

Application of inorganic and liquid organic bio-fertilizers affects the vegetative growth and rhizobacteria populations of eight banana cultivars (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7515>)

TRI HANDAYANI, TIRTA KUMALA DEWI, DIYAH MARTANTI, YUYU SURYASARI POERBA, SARJIYA ANTONIUS, WITJAKSONO

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7515/4644>)

Short Communication: *Cremanthodium indica* (Asteraceae, Senecioneae), a new species from the Eastern Himalaya, India (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7898>)

DIPANKAR BORAH, RAJEEV KUMAR SINGH, LOBSANG TASHI THUNGNON

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7898/4645>)

Molecular identification of five species of family Chaetomiaceae (Sordariomycetes, Ascomycota) from Iraqi soil (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7729>)

MUSTAFA A. AL-DOSSARY, SHAYMAA S. RAHEEM, MAYSOON K. ALMYAH

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7729/4646>)

Short Communication: A small-scale coprological survey of the endoparasites in the Himalayan goral *Naemorhedus goral* (Hardwick, 1825) in Nepal (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7526>)

JAGAN NATH ADHIKARI, ROSHAN BABU ADHIKARI, BISHNU PRASAD BHATTARAI, TEJ BAHADUR THAPA, TIRTH RAJ GHIMIRE

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7526/4647>)

Extracellular protease from *Bacillus subtilis* B315 with antagonistic activity against bacterial wilt pathogen (*Ralstonia solanacearum*) of chili (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7822>)

NUR PRIHATININGSIH, ARI ASNANI, HERU ADI DJATMIKO

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7822/4648>)

A pilot study into ecological burning in forests as part of a species conservation plan (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/6281>)

MATTHEW W. PEARSON

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/6281/4649>)

Traditional knowledge of medicinal plants in the Kampung Orang Asli Donglai Baru, Hulu Langat, Malaysia (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7903>)

MOHD RAZNAN RAMLI, SORAYYA MALEK, POZI MILOW, NURUL JANNAH AZIZ

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7903/4650>)

Morphological diversity and heritability of nine local sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor*) genotypes in East Java, Indonesia (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/6845>)

MAFTUCHAH, LIA FEBRIANA, SULISTYAWATI, HELVI ARDANA RESWARI, ERFAN DANI SEPTIA

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/6845/4651>)

Evaluation of Indigenous *Pichia kudriavzevii* from cocoa fermentation for a probiotic candidate (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7361>)

RAHAYU WULAN, RIKA INDRI ASTUTI, YAYA RUKAYADI, ANJA MERYANDINI

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7361/4652>)

Short Communication: Identification of culturable marine fungi and bacteria from coastal region in Brunei Darussalam (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7611>)

HUSSEIN TAHA, POOJA SHIVANAND, MOHAMAD ABDUL AZIM ZAINUDIN, NURUL AZIRAH HADANAN

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7611/4653>)

Evaluation of the ambrosia beetles traps on *Pterocarpus indicus* in Indonesia (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7737>)

HAGUS TARNO, YOGO SETIAWAN, BAMBANG TRI RAHARDJO, JIANGUO WANG

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7737/4654>)

Short Communication: Taxonomy and the first report for pollen and leaf surfaces anatomy of the genus *Enkleia* (Thymelaeaceae) in Thailand

(<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7862>)

PIYAPORN SAENSOUK; SURAPON SAENSOUK

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7862/4655>)

Variations of grain physical properties, amylose and anthocyanin of upland red rice cultivars from East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia
(<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7925>)

JENNY E.R. MARKUS, A.S.S. NDIWA, SHIRLY S. OEMATAN, YOSEP S. MAU

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7925/4656>)

Assessment of forest degradation condition in Natmataung National Park Watershed, Myanmar (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7108>)

YADANAR OO, WATHINEE SUANPAGA, PONTHEP MEUNPONG

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7108/4657>)

Prevalence, diversity and antimicrobial resistance of *Salmonella enterica* and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* isolates from spring water in a rural area of northwestern Morocco (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7377>)

ILHAM NASSRI, LATIFA TAHRI, AMAL SAIDI, NAJIA AMEUR, MOHAMMED FEKHAOUI

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7377/4658>)

Phenetic analysis and habitat preferences of wild orchids in Gunung Gajah, Purworejo, Indonesia (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7466>)

THERESIA HENNY PRIMASIWI PURBA, ABDUL RAZAQ CHASANI

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7466/4659>)

The occurrence of Anisakis larvae on hairtail, *Trichiurus lepturus* caught from the Pangandaran Waters, West Java, Indonesia
(<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7390>)

NISA QUROTA AYUN, LUTFI SEPTIANA DEWI, MURWANTOKO, EKO SETYOBUDI

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7390/4660>)

Involvement of purple acid phosphatase gene into nitrogen uptake of oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*) (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7499>)

SIGIT DWI MARYANTO, ZULFIKAR ACHMAD TANJUNG, ROBERDI, WIDYARTINI MADE SUDANIA, PUJANTO, HAIRINSYAH, CONDRU UTOMO, TONY LIWANG

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7499/4661>)

Short Communication: Prediction of body weight based on body

measurements in female Saburai goat
(<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7785>)

AKHMAD DAKHLAN, MUHAMMAD DIMA IQBAL HAMDANI, DELSI RUSITAIMI PUTRI,
SULASTRI, ARIF QISTHON

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7785/4662>)

Natural dye plants used by Dayak Iban in Sungai Utik, Kapuas Hulu, West
Kalimantan, Indonesia (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7730>)

WAHDINA, DEDE SETIADI, Y. PURWANTO, IBNUL QAYIM

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7730/4663>)

Phytophagous insects and predatory arthropods in soybean and zinnia
(<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/6186>)

ERISE ANGGRAINI, WIDA NUR ANISA, SITI HERLINDA, CHANDRA IRSAN; SUPARMAN
SUPARMAN; SUWANDI SUWANDI, MUHAMMAD UMAR HARUN, BAMBANG GUNAWAN

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/6186/4664>)

Cross shelf gradients of scleractinian corals in the Spermonde Islands,
South Sulawesi, Indonesia (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7357>)

SYAFYUDIN YUSUF, MARIA BEGER, ASMI CITRA MALINA A.R. TASSAKKA, MAARTEN DE
BRAUWER, AMANDA PRICELLA, RAHMI, WIDYASTUTI UMAR, GINO V. LIMMON, ABIGAIL
MARY MOORE, JAMALUDDIN JOMPA

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7357/4665>)

Short Communication: Plant diversity utilization and land cover
composition in the Subak Jatiluwih, Bali, Indonesia
(<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/6892>)

SUTOMO, RAJIF IRYADI, I DEWA PUTU DARMA, I PUTU AGUS HENDRA WIBAWA, AYYU
RAHAYU, SITI FATIMAH HANUM, SYAMSUL RIZAL, LEDYA NOVAMIZANTI, JANGKUNG
RAHARJO

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/6892/4666>)

Diversity of fungi associated with rhizosphere of healthy and diseased
garlic crop (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7626>)

BAIQ NURUL HIDAYAH, NANI HERAWATI, AI ROSAH AISAH, NITA RIZKY UTAMI

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7626/4667>)

Morphological characteristics of Indonesian Rubus flowers
(<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7792>)

SULUH NORMASIWI, ANDI SALAMAH, MUHAMMAD IMAM SURYA

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7792/4668>)

Short Communication: Zooplankton as indicator of trophic status of lakes in Ilmen State Reserve, Russia (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7842>)

IRINA V. MASHKOVA, ANASTASIYA M. KOSTRYUKOVA; ELENA E. SHCHELKANOVA;
VIKTOR V. TROFIMENKO2

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7842/4669>)

Molecular characteristics and taxonomic status of morphologically similar barnacles (*Amphibalanus*) assessed using the cytochrome c oxidase 1 gene (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7119>)

SRI RIANI, ROMANUS EDY PRABOWO, AGUS NURYANTO

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7119/4671>)

Screening of endophytic fungi from oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*) in producing exopolysaccharides (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7879>)

YURNALIZA YURNALIZA, IT JAMILAH, ADRIAN HARTANTO, ANISA LUTVIA

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7879/4670>)

Identification of bioactive compounds in gambier (*Uncaria gambir*) liquid by-product in West Sumatra, Indonesia (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7205>)

AKHIS SOLEH ISMAIL, YOSE RIZAL, ARMENIA, ANWAR KASIM

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7205/4672>)

Identification of marine sponges-symbiotic bacteria and their application in degrading polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7346>)

ISMAIL MARZUKI, MUDYAWATI KAMARUDDIN, RASHEED AHMAD

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7346/4673>)

Mangrove ecosystem in North Sumatran (Indonesia) forests serves as a suitable habitat for mud crabs (*Scylla serrata* and *S. olivacea*) (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7778>)

RIKA KARNIATI, NURDIN SULISTİYONO, RIZKA AMELIA, BEJO SLAMET, YUNTHA BIMANTARA, MOHAMMAD BASYUNI

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7778/4674>)

Estimation of Above Ground Biomass and carbon stocks of *Tectona grandis*

and *Gmelina arborea* stands in Gorontalo Province, Indonesia
(<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7790>)

YOSEP RUSLIM, DAUD SANDALAYUK, ROCHADI KRISTININGRUM, ANDI SAHRI ALAM

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7790/4675>)

Antifungal activities of the rhizome extract of five member Zingiberaceae against *Candida albicans* and *Trichophyton rubrum*
(<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7217>)

MUHAMMAD EVY PRASTIYANTO, NI'MATUR ROHMAH, LESITA EFENDI, RAHMATIA ARIFIN, FANDHI ADI WARDOYO, WILDIANI WILSON, ANA HIDAYATI MUKAROMAH, SRI SINTO DEWI, SRI DARMAWATI

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7217/4676>)

Surface ultrastructure of *Blastocystis* sp. isolated from cattle
(<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7553>)

NI KOMANG APRILINA WIDISUPUTRI, NUNUK DYAH RETNO LASTUTI, ENDANG SUPRIHATI, POEDJI HASTUTIEK, HANI PLUMERIASTUTI, MUFASIRIN, HENI PUSPITASARI, LUCIA TRI SUWANTI

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7553/4677>)

Indigeneous *Streptomyces* spp. isolated from *Cyperus rotundus* rhizosphere indicate high mercuric reductase activity as a potential bioremediation agent (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7774>)

HANUM MUKTI RAHAYU, WAHYU ARISTYANING PUTRI, ANIS USWATUN KHASANAH, LANGKAH SEMBIRING, YEKTI ASIH PURWESTRI

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7774/4678>)

Fucoxanthin identification and purification of brown algae commonly found in Lombok Island, Indonesia (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7155>)

YENI SULISTIYANI, AGUS SABDONO, NORMA AFIATI, HAERUDDIN

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7155/4679>)

Inhibition of β -glucosidase activity, metals content, and phytochemical profiling of *Andrographis paniculata* from different geographical origins based on FTIR and UHPLC-Q-Orbitrap HRMS metabolomics
(<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7798>)

MOHAMAD RAFI, DEWI ANGGRAINI SEPTANINGSIH, ALFI HUDATUL KAROMAH, LUKMAN, BAMBANG PRAJOGO, MUHAMMAD BACHRI AMRAN, ABDUL ROHMAN

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7798/4680>)

Valuing ecotourism in Bukit Merah Orang Utan Island, Malaysia based on visitors' experience (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7918>)

NABILA FARHANA MOHD-ASRI, SITI NORSYUHADA KAMALUDDIN, SABAPATHY DHARMALINGAM, WAN MOHD RAZI IDRIS, BADRUL MUNIR MD ZAIN

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7918/4681>)

Molecular identification of coprophilous microfungi from Banyumas District, Central Java, Indonesia (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7293>)

ARIS MUMPUNI, ADI AMURWANTO, DANIEL JOKO WAHYONO

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7293/4691>)

Effect of fertilizer application on winter wheat productivity under precision agriculture in Kazakhstan (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7486>)

ALIBEK BAIMURATOV, SHOLPAN BASTAUBAYEVA, MEHMET ARSLAN, ZHANAR YERALIYEVA

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7486/4682>)

Molecular identification of a new isolate of actinobacteria ATIS61 and characterization of the protease activities (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7870>)

FADHLIAH AMFAR, LENNI FITRI, SUHARTONO

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/7870/4683>)

Morphological evaluation and determination keys of 21 citrus genotypes at seedling stage (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/8045>)

RAHMAT BUDIARTO, ROEDHY POERWANTO, EDI SANTOSA, DARDA EFENDI

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/8045/4685>)

Diversity, conservation, potential uses, and alien species of lowland plants of Batang Toru, Sumatra, Indonesia (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/8057>)

HIRMAS F. PUTRA, WENDY A. MUSTAQIM

PDF (<https://smujo.id/biodiv/article/view/8057/4684>)

Information

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Nusantara Bioscience (<https://smujo.id/nb>)

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Surface ultrastructure of *Blastocystis* sp. isolated from cattle

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Abstract. *Widisuputri NKA, Lastuti NDR, Suprihati E, Hastutiek P, Plumeriastuti H, Mufasirin, Puspitasari H, Suwanti LT. 2021. Surface ultrastructure of Blastocystis sp. isolated from cattle. Biodiversitas 22: 1514-1518. Blastocystis* sp is a protozoan parasite commonly detected in the intestinal tract of humans and various animals that causes zoonotic blastocystosis. The pathogenic potential of *Blastocystis* is still being evaluated, some *Blastocystis* sp are completely pathogenic, while others can be considered commensal and hypothetical, related to the role of the surface coat of *Blastocystis* sp. This study aimed to compare the surface ultrastructure of *Blastocystis* sp. in cattle with diarrhea and non diarrhea by Scanning Electron Microscope (SEM). Four *Blastocystis* sp. isolates were selected from the faeces of four positives cattle which consisted of two diarrhea and two non-diarrhea cattle. The result showed that *Blastocystis* sp. in cattle appeared in round shape and reproduced by binary fission. The surface cell of *Blastocystis* sp. isolates from diarrhea cattle had a rough surface while organism of non diarrhea cattle isolates was very smooth. Bacteria were seen attached to the surface of *Blastocystis* sp. from diarrhea cattle faeces. In conclusion, the features of the surface structure of *Blastocystis* sp. correlated with symptomatic appearance. The surface structure of *Blastocystis* sp. isolates from cattle with diarrhea was rougher than non diarrhea.

Keywords: *Blastocystis*, cattle with diarrhea, scanning electron microscope, surface structure

INTRODUCTION

Blastocystis sp. is a protozoan parasite that commonly found in the intestinal tract of humans and varied of animals and its infection caused blastocystosis (Wawrzyniak et al. 2013). Animals that were infected include mammals, birds, amphibians, and reptiles (Cian et al. 2017). In recent years, researches on the identification and prevalence of *Blastocystis* sp. both in humans and animals have been reported throughout the world (Lee et al. 2012) and several studies have shown that *Blastocystis* infection is zoonotic, this is evidenced by the discovery of the same subtype (ST) in humans and animals (Osman et al. 2016). *Blastocystis* infection is a waterborne or foodborne disease, and oral transmission occurs due to ingestion of the infective stage, cysts, which contaminate water and food (Lee et al. 2012). The prevalence of *Blastocystis* infection in humans in developing countries is significantly higher than in developed countries (El Safadi et al. 2016). Poor hygiene practices, close contact with animals, and consumption of contaminated food or water are factors in the high prevalence of blastocystosis in people (Wawrzyniak et al. 2013). Symptoms of blastocystosis are non-specific such as diarrhea, abdominal pain, constipation, flatulence, fatigue, urticaria and skin rash (Parija and Jeremiah 2013; Wawrzyniak et al. 2013) and most of cases are asymptomatic (Yason and Tan 2018). Some researchers found *Blastocystis* sp both in the host

with or without clinical symptoms, this is the reason why the pathogenicity of *Blastocystis* is still being (Roberts et al. 2014; Skotarczak 2018). However, some researchers point to serious consequences due to this parasitic infection, in which, *Blastocystis* sp. was known to play a role in irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) (Ragavan et al. 2014; 2015) and induced precancerous polyp formation (Kumarasamy et al. 2017).

Diagnose of *Blastocystis* sp. generally based on the morphologically parasite in faeces by direct examination using the light microscope or by *in vitro* cultivation method. *Blastocystis* sp. is morphologically in the form of vacuoles, granular, amoeboid, or cysts (Wawrzyniak et al. 2013), but the morphology of *Blastocystis* sp. isolates from humans and animals, is difficult to be distinguished only by light microscopy examination, as they were morphologically similar (Zhang et al. 2012). Previous study by Suwanti et al. (2020a) reported that the morphology of *Blastocystis* sp. in cattle were varied widely in size with 2.78 – 35.35 μm (average 14.76 μm) in which 100% of the cattle samples were positive for *Blastocystis* however differentiation between diarrhea and non-diarrheal cattle were not considered.

Examination using an electron microscope recently shed new light on the morphology of parasites, one of which by using Scanning Electron Microscope (SEM). Using SEM aimed to obtain detailed information on the morphology and topography of the cell surface of a

microorganism (de Souza and Attias 2018). Research on surface ultrastructure *Blastocystis* sp. using SEM has been reported in humans, monkeys, pigs, chickens, rats and cockroaches which have varying differences in their surface coat (Cassidy et al. 1994; Haziqah et al. 2017). According to Yason and Tan (2018), electron micrographs showed variations in the surface coats from the different *Blastocystis* isolates and these differences could be attributed to differences in the pathogenic potential of the *Blastocystis* subtype. It has also been proven by Ahmed et al. (2019) that the surface ultrastructure of *Blastocystis* sp. was rougher in isolates from patients with colorectal carcinoma.

Until now, the research of surface ultrastructure of *Blastocystis* sp. in cattle has not been reported. As already mentioned above, the results of previous studies showed the morphology of *Blastocystis* sp. in cattle with diarrhea and no diarrhea were the same. The aim of this study was to compare the surface structure of *Blastocystis* from cultured faeces samples of cattle with (symptomatic) and no diarrhea (asymptomatic) using SEM.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Ethical approval

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Animal Care and Use Committee of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Universitas Airlangga (approval number: 2.KE. 095.05.2019)

Isolate of *Blastocystis* sp

Isolate was *Blastocystis* sp. isolated from the feces of Madura cattle in Kamal and Socah, Bangkalan, Madura, Indonesia. Isolation was carried out in 2018, by taking samples of fresh feces that had just fallen to the ground. A total of 108 samples were examined. The presence of *Blastocystis* sp. in feces was detected by both morphologically and genetically based on the 18S rRNA gene (Suwanti et al. 2020b). The Isolate were stored in the Department of Veterinary Parasitology, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Universitas Airlangga.

In Vitro Cultivation

Four *Blastocystis* sp. isolates were subcultured from four positive cattle samples consisting of two diarrhea and two non-diarrhea cattle. Each sample was cultured in RPMI 1640 medium (CP19-2763, Capricorn Scientific, Germany) and incubated at 37°C for 3 days. The growth of *Blastocystis* sp. in culture was observed morphologically under a light microscope (Nikon® E100, Japan) at 400X magnification. Microscope was connected to a camera (Optilab® MTN001, Indonesia) to capture the image of the parasites. The supernatant of the culture medium was inserted into the tube and centrifuged at 1500 rpm for 10 minutes. Supernatant was removed and pellets was resuspended with phosphate buffered saline (PBS) and stored for SEM observation.

Scanning Electron Microscope (SEM)

Cell of *Blastocystis* sp. were washed with PBS pH 7 for three times by centrifugation. It was centrifuged with speed 3000 rpm for 5 minutes. Then each sample was fixed by adding 2.5% glutaraldehyde and post-fixation with 1% osmium tetroxide. The isolate was mounted on a polycarbonate membrane and dehydrated using ethanol in sequence 30%, 50%, 70%, 80%, 90%, and 100%. Each ethanol series was done for 15 minutes and the last step was added with amyl acetate. Critical Point Drying (CPD) was performed using carbon dioxide, then the specimen was coated using a gold coating, and observed using SEM (Ragavan et al. 2014). SEM images were captured at the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, Institut Teknologi Sepuluh November (ITS) Surabaya.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Morphology of *Blastocystis* in medium culture

On culture media *Blastocystis* sp. most of the vacuolar forms (Figure 1). In previous study, it was found that the diameter of *Blastocystis* sp. in cattles was varied widely with ranged about 2.78 to 35.35 µm (average 14.76µm) and the size of *Blastocystis* sp. in culture was smaller than in fresh stool (Suwanti et al. 2020a). The main morphology of *Blastocystis* sp. has four forms: vacuole, granular, amoeboid and cyst form (Wawrzyniak et al. 2013) and the vacuolar form was the most common cell form found in cultures (Natalia et al. 2018). Under a light microscope, the morphology of *Blastocystis* sp. from healthy cattle (without diarrhea) and diarrhea cattle could not be distinguished. According to Tan et al. (2008), *Blastocystis* poses considerable challenges for diagnostic laboratories. The morphology of *Blastocystis* sp. is difficult to distinguish by using light microscopy only (Zhang et al. 2012). Yanson and Tan (2018) using an electron microscope show variations in the membrane surface from three *Blastocystis* isolates and these differences could be associated with the differences in the pathogenic potential of *Blastocystis* subtypes.

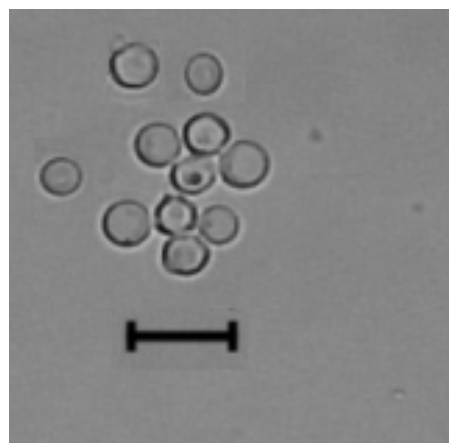


Figure 1. *Blastocystis* sp. in cattle in medium culture. Bar 10 µm

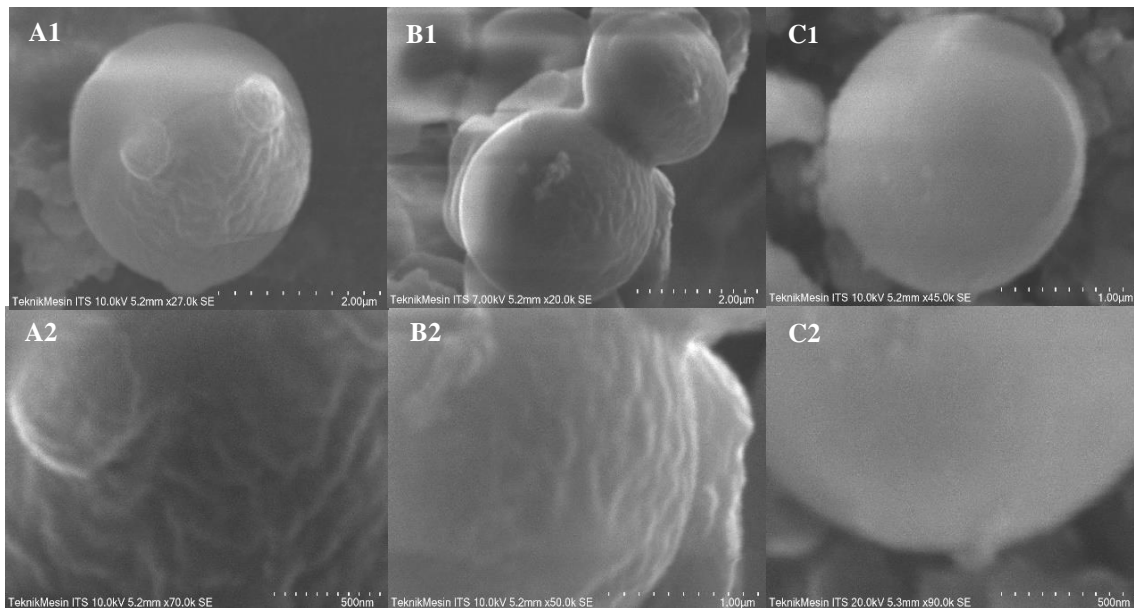


Figure 2. The scanning electron micrograph showing the cell surface of *Blastocystis* sp. isolated from the *in vitro* culture. A and B *Blastocystis* sp. from feces of cattle with diarrhea. C. *Blastocystis* sp. from faeces of asymptomatic cattle. Red arrows are daughter cell. Black arrows are bacteria.

Appearance of the surface structure of *Blastocystis* sp. Using SEM

In this decade, SEM was used widely in the morphological studies of a cell based on the structural surface of the cell, including *Blastocystis* sp. (Boreham and Stenzel 1993; Zaman et al. 1999; Tan et al. 2008; Zhang et al. 2012; Ragavan et al. 2014; Ahmed et al. 2019). SEM revealed the external morphological shape of the cyst and various surface coat structures of the parasite (Zhang et al. 2012). The surface coat was a kind of fibrous substance in varying appearance, rough or fine, which adhere to the surface of the *Blastocystis* cells (Elsayad et al. 2019). This study is the first report on the surface structure of *Blastocystis* sp. in cattle, both in symptomatic (diarrhea) and asymptomatic cattle.

In this study, it was found that *Blastocystis* sp. in cattle appeared in round shape. This result was similar with the morphology of *Blastocystis* in human which presented by Boreham and Stenzel (1993), generally the shape of *Blastocystis* from *in vitro* culture were spherical in shape. Round shape was also found by Ahmed et al. (2019) in addition to other forms, oval and irregular. *Blastocystis* cells often possess one or two nuclei, and occasionally, quadrinucleate cells and cells possessing numerous nuclei have been reported (Tan 2008). According to Zhang et al. (2007), there were five modes of reproduction, namely, binary fission, endodyogeny, plasmotomy, budding and schizogeny. In this study, the reproduction of *blastocystis* sp is shown in Figures 2.A1 and 2.B1. Figure 2.A1 was probably the initial stage of plasmotomy reproduction. Plasmotomy reproduction occurred during the stage of vacuolar form, which a daughter cell came into being by forming a finger-like cytoplasmic extension from the cellular surface of the mother vacuolar cell (Zhang et al.

2007). Figure 2.B1, *Blastocystis* sp. was seen undergo binary fission similarly reported by Elsayad et al. (2019) and Mehlhorn et al. (2012).

The surface cell of *Blastocystis* sp. isolates from diarrheal cattle had a rough surface as shown in Figure 2.A and 2.B. Whereas organism of non diarrhea cattle isolates was very smooth (Figure 2.C). Elsayad et al. (2019), using SEM micrographs shown different outer morphology of *Blastocystis* in human covered by rough or smooth surface coat, but there was no further explanation regarding the differences. The smooth surface structure of *Blastocystis* sp. isolates from non diarrheal cattle is similar to *Blastocystis* in asymptomatic human isolates as described previously by Suresh et al. (1994). The rough surface cell illustration in diarrheal cattle in this study supported the results of a study previously reported by Boreham and Stenzel (1993) that rough morphology of cells was found on isolates of *Blastocystis* from a diarrhea patient. This cell surface structure may be related to the pathogenicity of organisms related to the symptoms shown. It is suggested that a rough surface *Blastocystis* is more pathogenic than a smooth surface and the features of the surface structure of *Blastocystis* sp. correlated with symptomatic appearance. Tan et al. (2008), Ragavan et al. (2014) and Ahmed et al. (2019) stated that there were differences in the surface ultrastructure of *Blastocystis* isolated from human derived from symptomatic and asymptomatic persons; *Blastocystis* from symptomatic isolates have coarser surface structure while asymptomatic isolates have a smooth surface structure. Rougher with excessive indentation surface was drawn from isolates derived from suffering patients IBS (Ragavan et al. 2014) and colorectal carcinoma (Ahmed et al. 2019).

Several studies using SEM to observed *Blastocystis* have indicated that the surface coat is associated with bacteria. The surface coat contains a variety of carbohydrates and has been postulated to play a role in trapping and degrading bacteria for nutrition (Tan 2008). In this study, bacteria were seen attached to the surface of *Blastocystis* sp. from cattle with diarrhea (Figure 2.B₁). The attachment of bacteria to the surface of *Blastocystis* isolated from human samples had been confirmed by SEM studies. Attached bacteria on the surface of *Blastocystis* have been seen in close association with the surface coat and often causing an indentation (Boreham and Stenzel 1993). Although some surface coat functions are not yet known exactly, it is thought to be a mechanism for trapping bacteria for nutritional purposes and attachment to the intestinal epithelial lining (Zaman et al. 1999) and according to Yason and Tan (2018), the surface coat of *Blastocystis* sp. associates with potentially pathogenic of *Blastocystis* subtype. There was a hypothesis that surface coat protects the organism from innate host immune response as well as contribute to greater *adhesion* during colonization (Yason and Tan 2018).

In conclusion, by SEM, most of *Blastocystis* sp. isolated from the *in vitro* cultivation method of cattle faeces appeared in round shape with and reproduced by binary fission. Meanwhile, the surfaces cell of *Blastocystis* sp. isolates from cattle with diarrhea had a rough surface while *Blastocystis* isolated from asymptomatic cattle isolates were having very smooth surface. Bacteria were seen attached to the surface of *Blastocystis* sp. from cattle with diarrhea. The features of the surface structure of *Blastocystis* sp. correlated with symptomatic appearance. The surface structure of *Blastocystis* sp. isolates from cattle with diarrhea was rougher than non diarrhea. Research on the determinants of the pathogenicity of *Blastocystis* is still needed.

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