DAVAO RESEARCH JOURNAL

https://davaoresearchjournal.ph P-ISSN 2244-4432 E-ISSN 2984-7125

The Undying Legacy of Dr. Analyn A. Cabras: Memoir of her Mentees and the Countless Hearts she Touched

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Submitted: 02 Mar 2025
Published: 24 Mar 2025

OPEN ACCESS

ABSTRACT

Dr. Analyn A. Cabras made significant contributions to Philippine entomology, particularly in the study of Pachyrhynchini weevils. This paper presents a memoir of our experiences as her mentees, highlighting her role as both a mentor and a dedicated scientist. Through her guidance, we gained firsthand experience in beetle taxonomy, specimen analysis, and taxonomic classification of Pachyrhynchini weevils. Her commitment to advancing knowledge in entomology was evident in her extensive body of published work and collaborations with both local and international researchers. Despite facing professional challenges, Dr. Cabras remained steadfast in her pursuit of scientific discovery. She upheld her principles, dedicating herself to research and fostering an environment of intellectual curiosity. Beyond her scientific contributions, she was a mentor who not only guided her mentees in beetle taxonomy but also provided them with opportunities to publish their work and contribute to the growing body of knowledge. Her influence extended far beyond her laboratory in DORSU, shaping the careers of young taxonomists and inspiring future researchers. This paper aims to honor her enduring legacy in Philippine biodiversity research, particularly her pioneering studies on Pachyrhynchini weevils. More than a mentor, she was a friend and a source of inspiration, leaving an indelible mark on our lives and the scientific community.

Keywords: Beetles, biodiversity, Cabras, Explorers, Pachyrhynchini

How to cite: Agbas, D. J. D., and Obrial, G. G. (2025). The Undying Legacy of Dr. Analyn A. Cabras: Memoir of her Mentees and the Countless Hearts she Touched. *Davao Research Journal*, 16(1), 126-132. https://doi.org/10.59120/drj.v16i1.320

INTRODUCTION

The first time we saw Dr. Analyn A. Cabras was during an online conference hosted by Davao Oriental State University (DORSU), broadcast live on Facebook in 2023. We still remember her passion as she shared her research on Pachyrhynchini weevils. Before formally meeting her, we (Daven and Graden) were plant hobbyists. Particularly drawn to the native flora thriving in forested areas, the unusual plants such as interesting endemic species, and carnivorous plants. As plant enthusiasts, we frequently embarked on short expeditions, exploring accessible pristine forests areas of Davao Oriental and Davao de Oro documenting the wild flora. During one of our trips, we photographed a weevil species in Davao de Oro, later identified as *Metapocyrtus khueli* Cabras, Villanueva, and Medina, 2021 (Cabras et. al., 2021). That moment marked the beginning of our profound fascination with weevils.

We posted the photo on Facebook along with the other interesting flora we had documented during the trip, later, a friend of ours—a BS Biology student—commented on the post and tagged Dr. Cabras. Moments after, she provided the identification of the weevil species (*M. khueli*). This encounter sparked our interest in weevils, particularly the brightly colored ones she studied from the tribe Pachyrhynchini (Pachyrhynchine Weevils).

From then on, we began documenting weevils and other beetle species we encountered in the field, regularly sending photographs to Dr. Cabras via facebook messenger for identification. As an incredibly accommodating person, especially to those who shared her passion for this taxon, she always responded promptly, nurturing our growing fascination with weevils.

Most of the beetles we photographed were common weevil species, often considered pests in agricultural environments such as banana plantations and vegetable farms. Despite this, Dr. Cabras never diminished our enthusiasm. Instead of dismissing our interest with sarcasm or indifference, she fueled our passion, praising our dedication to documenting these species in the wild. After many exchanges over Facebook Messenger, she invited us to visit her laboratory at DORSU. She showed us her collection and the species she had described over the years as a taxonomist. Seeing her boxes of weevil materials, we were mesmerized by the stunning specimens of Easter egg weevils, majority of which were endemic species we never knew existed.

In this paper, we share our experiences as mentees of the late Dr. Cabras, hoping to provide readers with a glimpse of her as a brilliant scientist, mentor, and an inspiring individual whose pioneering research on the tribe Pachyrhynchini has led to groundbreaking discoveries in Philippine science, leaving behind a legacy that will endure forgenerations.

A humble mentor and a friend

Although we have only known Dr. Cabras for a little over a year, she has been a great mentor and a friend to us. At her laboratory in the university, she would assign us taxonomic tasks, provide specimens for examination, and guide us in our work. Her excitement was contagious whenever she encountered exciting materials with unique evolutionary traits among their congeners. She would marvel at the minute details she observed, her enthusiasm sparking our curiosity. Watching her deeply engrossed in the intricacies of the weevil specimens under her stereo microscope made us eagerto understand what had captured her attention. She would then invite us to examine the specimens individually, allowing us time to identify their intriguing characteristics.

After our thorough examination, she would ask us to share our observations, encouraging discussion and important analysis in defining taxonomic traits. Finally, she would explain what she had observed in detail, confirming our insights and emphasizing which parts were significant for species delineation. Through her patient guidance, she taught us advanced weevil taxonomy throughout 2024—a skill we honed and earned through our religious attendance in her laboratory. Her mentorship not only sharpened our taxonomic skills but also deepened our appreciation for the meticulous work of studying weevil taxonomy

Dr. Cabras was never one to put on a facade when dealing with other people, but remained civil and composed. She had only a handful of close friends at the university, the closest being her longtime colleague, Dr. Milton Medina, with whom

Figure 1. Fieldwork (collaborative effort) with Canada National Museum (CNM), Philippine National Museum, University of Mindanao, and California Academy of Sciences (CAS) in Davao City (A, B), Leaf litter beetles catching lessons with Dr. Bob Anderson (CNM), Dr. Matthew Van Dam (CAS), and Dr. Analyn Cabras (C, D).

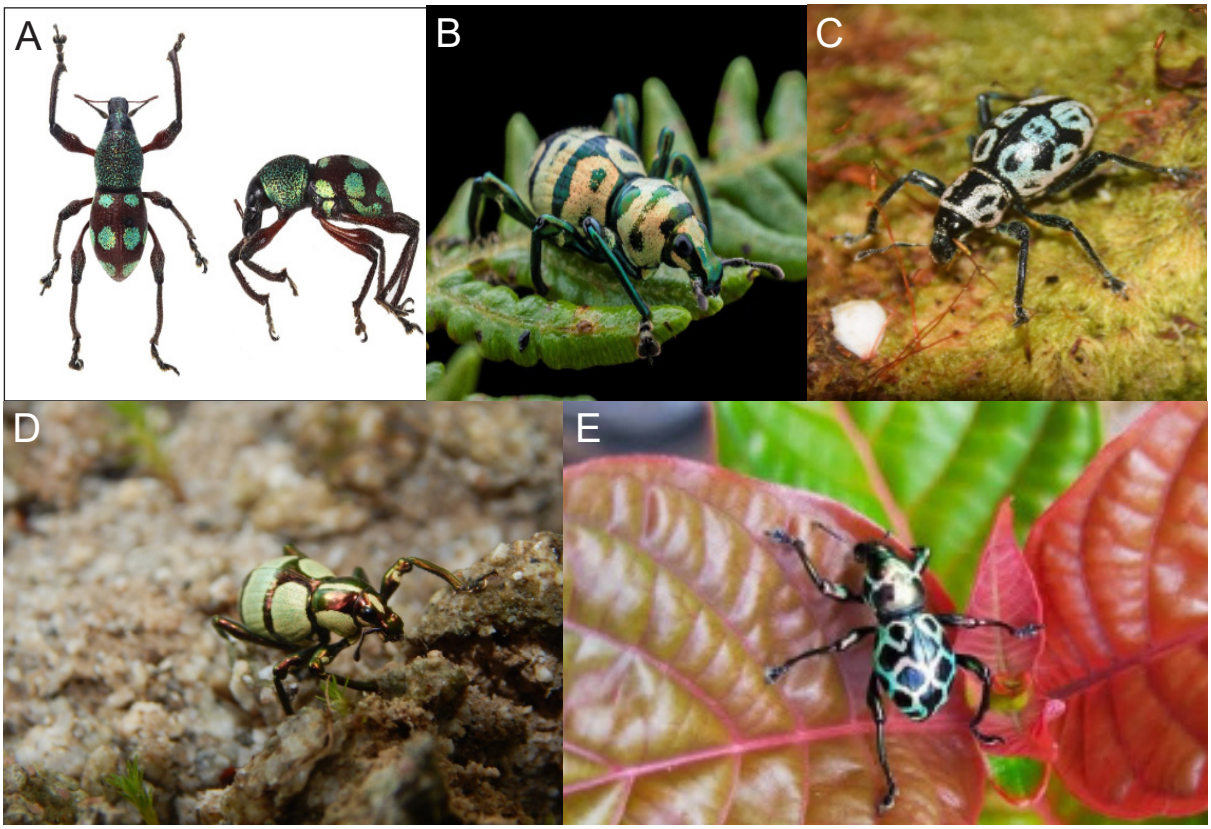

Figure 2. The dorsal and lateral habitus of *Metapocyrtus baltazarae* Cabras and Bollino, 2023 (A), *Pachyrhynchus Panumanun* Cabras and Medina, 2022 (B), *Metapocyrtus* (*Orthocyrtus*) *willietorresi* Cabras and Medina, 2018 (C), *Pachyrhynchus miltoni* Cabras and Rukmane-Barbale, 2016 (D), and *Pachyrhynchus* cabrasae Rukmane-Barbale and Barševskis, 2016 (E).

 DOI: https://doi.org/10.59120/drj.v16i1.320

she had worked the longest, and the ever-supportive Sir Johnnel Villegas, who "took on the role as "ice-breaker" whenever things grew serious in the lab. We take pride in being among the select few she genuinely connected with something she had made sure to express, often referring to us fondlyas "her kind of people."

The fruits of her mentorship have been realized nearly a year later, as we successfully published scientific papers as lead authors under her guidance (Obrial et. al., 2024; Agbas et. al., 2024), with many more still awaiting publication.

She also connected us with her collaborators, both local and international, giving us invaluable learning experiences. We had the pleasure of meeting her first team from the University of Mindanao and her collaborators from the Philippine National Museum, the California Academy of Sciences, and the Canada National Museum—some of them are incredible and renowned world coleoptera authorities (Figure 1). The experiences and opportunities she provided were beyond anything we had expected, especially as students curious weevil taxonomy. Meeting and being mentored by such an extraordinary scientist—a woman whose research laid the foundation for weevil taxonomy in the Philippines and whose influence extends internationally—has been remarkable.

Her time at DORSU was not what she had envisioned, as she often faced challenges from some of her colleagues despite keeping to herself. She stayed in her laboratory most of the time, entirely dedicated to her weevil research. Yet, despite the hardships she encountered, she never retaliated. Instead, she chose to rise above it all, leaving behind those who sought to hinder her and focusing solely on her work and ongoing publications. She had always told us that *"in the grand scheme of things, the people who are bad-mouthing me and making my life in this university a not-so-good experience won't matter. I can always let them be and continue my work."* She was true to her words; she did not move to get back at the people who were making her life hard, even though she had her chance to fight back. Dr. Cabras, despite having a very impressive curriculum vitae and good standing in the scientific community, had never even once boasted of any of her achievements and stayed humble. However, she admitted that she was not very effective at teaching, especially in her classes, because the only thing she wanted to do and focus on was her research. She was a great mentor, teacher (not all of us may have the same perspective), and a good friend who guided and taught us taxonomy, and, most importantly, selflessly shared her knowledge and expertise without expecting compensation (Figure 3).

A dedicated scientist

Dr. Analyn A. Cabras dedicated over a decade to studying jewel weevils (tribe Pachyrhynchini) and published over a hundred scientific research papers throughout her lifetime. Her private collection, housing hundreds of Pachyrhynchini specimens from various parts of the Philippines, is well-represented and the country's most significant weevil collection.

When writing scientific articles, Dr. Cabras often worked on multiple papers at a time. However, she preferred to write at her own pace, not rushing the writing process. For her, describing species was more than work—it was her passion. She often expressed that she was "living a dream," finding joy in every discovery rather than seeing it as a mere task.

In just a year, she contributed to multiple scientific papers, all centered on beetle taxonomy. Many of these studies focused on Philippine Pachyrhynchini weevils, including those published in 2024 (Agbas et. al., 2024; Obrial et. al., 2024; Van Dam et. al., 2024; Medina et. al., 2024a, 2024b; Legaspi et. al., 2024; Cabras et. al., 2024a, 2024b; Villegas et. al., 2024). Publishing more than seven scientific papers in a year is an extraordinary achievement that only a few can accomplish.

Her contribution to Philippine science inspires budding Filipino taxonomists, especially those who want to specialize in Philippine beetles. She has also been part of many collaborative works with local and international scientists (to mention a few: Medina et. al., 2025; Tseng et. al., 2024; Van Dam et. al., 2024; Medina et. al., 2023a; Barsevskis et. al., 2023; Cabras et. al., 2023a), efforts that allowed Filipino coleoptera researchers to work with renowned international researchers in the field of coleopterology. This act also allowed her students and other Filipino collaborators to publish papers, introducing new beetle species to science. Be-

cause of this feat, some endemic weevil and beetle species now have IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) assessments (Medina et. al., 2023b; Schultz et. al., 2023; Cabras et. al., 2023b; Fortescue et. al., 2023), a great move to the conservation efforts for the endemic Philippine beetle species.

Figure 3. Dr. Analyn Cabras works with a weevil specimen at the Coleoptera Research Center, University of Mindanao. Photo credit: Jomari Valdez.

Multiple beetle species have also been named after her, namely: *Tsounkranaglenea cabrasae* Medina and Barševskis, 2024, *Olenecamptus cabrasae* Medina, 2023, *Cacia cabrasae* Medina, Vitali, and Barševskis, 2023, *Cleomenes cabrasae* Barševska and Barševskis, 2020, *Callimetopus cabrasae* Barševskis, 2018, *Lamprobityle cabrasae* Barševskis, 2018, *Doliops cabrasae* Barševskis, 2017, and *Pachyrhynchus cabrasae* Rukmane-Bārbale and Barševskis, 2016 (Medina and Barševskis, 2024; Medina, 2023; Medina et. al., 2023c; Barševska and Barševskis, 2020; Barševskis, 2018a; Barševskis, 2018b; Barševskis, 2017; Rukmane-Bārbale and Barševskis, 2016) (Figure 2). These honor her outstanding efforts in beetle taxonomy, her collaborative work, and her good relationship with foreign and local expert taxonomists. Even at her final moments, the great Dr. Cabras was still drafting and finishing multiple papers the day before her scheduled operation. This act further proved her dedication to science, especially in beetle taxonomy. Her life's work will forever leave a mark on Philippine science and on the countless lives she touched.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our gratitude to Dr. Milton Norman Medina for the guidance in refining the unfinished drafts of Dr. Analyn Cabras and for facilitating their publication; to Mr. Kenneth Chin (*P. panumanun*), Mr. Tristan Luap P. Senarillos (*P. cabrasae*),, and Mr. Jomar Valdez for letting the authors use their photos; to sir Johnnel P. Villegas for his continued support to the authors. To the Coleoptera research team of DORSU and UM for the friendship and support, and to the author's late mentor, Dr. Analyn A. Cabras, for the values, experiences, opportunities, guidance, mentorship, and friendship she had provided.

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