Correlating nanostructures with function:
Structural colours in wings of a Malaysian beetle

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Structural colours refer to colours generated by nanostructures, with the characteristic dimension of the structures on the wavelength of the visible light (i.e., some hundreds of nanometers). Examples for structural colours are the colours of CDs and DVDs, the colours of soap bubbles or oil films on water (thin films), or the colours of certain butterfly wings (e.g., photonic crystals) [1,2].

Recently, we located a Malaysian beetle with iridescent structural coloration on its wings (see Figure). The generation of the colouration is still unknown, and there is no respective scientific literature available.

First attempts to investigate the nanostructures of the wing were performed with non-contact atomic force microscopy (AFM, Park Systems XE-100), with a cantilever of 40 N/m and a resonance frequency of 300.000 kHz. The AFM scans reveal three layers with structures with a diameter of several hundreds of nanometers (see Figure). This rules out thin films as the structures yielding the coloration.

Future research and correlation of various structures with function in this beetle wings will shed light on the contribution of these structures visible in the first AFM scans to the colouration. Structural colours produced by nature inspire novel approaches in man-made colours, via biomimetics (i.e., knowledge transfer from biology to technology) [3,4].
References


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