

New animal and plant species found in Vietnam

World Wildlife Fund scientists said today that the discovery of 11 new animal and plant species in a remote area in central Vietnam underscores the importance of conservation efforts in the ancient tropical forests of the region.

Within the ancient tropical forests of a region known as Vietnam's "Green Corridor," scientists found a snake, five orchids, and two butterflies as well as three other plants new to science and exclusive to the Annamites Mountain Range. Ten other plant species, including four orchids, are still under examination but also appear to be new species.

"Discoveries of so many new species are rare and occur only in very special places like the Green Corridor," said Dr. Chris Dickinson, WWF's chief conservation scientist in the Green Corridor. "Several large mammal species were discovered in the 1990s in the same forests so these latest discoveries may be just the tip of the iceberg."

The rainforests of the Central Annamites likely existed as continuous undisturbed forest cover for thousands of years, and, as a result, offer unique habitats for many species, said WWF experts.

The new snake species, called the white-lipped keelback, prefers living by streams where it catches frogs and other small animals. With a beautiful yellow-white stripe sweeping along its head and red dots covering its body, the white-lipped keelback can reach 31 inches—almost a yard in length.

Three of the new orchid species are entirely leafless, a rarity even among orchids. Containing none of the chlorophyll or green pigment commonly found in plants, these orchids live on decaying matter like many fungal species. The other new plants include an aspidistra which produces a nearly black flower and a newly-discovered species of arum with beautiful yellow flowers. Arum plants have funnel-shaped leaves surrounding the flowers.

The two new butterfly species are among eight discovered in the province since 1996. One is a skipper – a butterfly with quick, darting flight habits—from the genus *Zela* and the other is a new genus in the subfamily of Satyrinae.

According to WWF experts, all of these species are at risk from illegal logging, hunting, unsustainable extraction of natural resources and conflicting development interests. However, local authorities – in particular the Thua Thien Hue Provincial Forest Protection Department – have committed to conserve and sustainably manage these valuable forests.

"The area is extremely important for conservation and the province wants to protect the forests and their environmental services, as well as contribute to sustainable development," said Hoang Ngoc Khanh, director of Thua Thien Hue Provincial Forest Protection Department.

Stretching from the mountainous forests of the Annamites to one of the last remaining lowland wet evergreen forests, the Green Corridor supports significant populations of threatened species and includes some of the longest remaining stretches of lowland river with intact forest habitat in Vietnam feeding into the Perfume River. Recent surveys found 15 reptiles and amphibians and six bird species among the threatened species living there. It is also home to one of the world's most endangered primates—white-cheeked crested gibbons—and the best location in Vietnam to save the saola—a unique type of wild cattle just discovered by scientists in 1992.

Source: World Wildlife Fund

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