

Dwarf dragons discovered in the Andes of Peru and Ecuador

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Male holotype of another species described in this paper, *Enyalioides sophiarothschildae*. Credit: Pablo J. Venegas

Scientists have discovered three new species of dragon-esque woodlizards in the Andes of Peru and Ecuador. The new species differ from their closest relatives in scale features, coloration and DNA. The study was published in the open access journal *ZooKeys*.

Field and laboratory work by Omar Torres-Carvajal (Museo de Zoología QCAZ, Ecuador), Pablo J. Venegas (CORBIDI, Peru), and Kevin de Queiroz (Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History, U.S.A) has resulted in the discovery of three [new species](#) of dragon-esque woodlizards from Andean cloudforests in Ecuador and Peru.

The unusual discoveries took place in areas within the 1,542,644 km² [Tropical Andes hotspot](#), western South America.

Finding three new species of woodlizards is a striking fact given that they are among the largest and most colorful lizards in South American forests.

Woodlizards (*Enyalioides*) are diurnal and live in lowland tropical rainforests, such as the Chocó and western Amazon basin, as well as cloudforests on both sides of the Andes. The new species described by Torres-Carvajal et al. increases the number of species of woodlizards to 15.

Recent expeditions to several localities along the Andes of Ecuador and Peru led to the collection of several specimens of woodlizards, which the authors suspected were something new. After comparing the new specimens with those deposited in several [natural history](#) museums from many countries, the author's suspicions became stronger.



Live male of *Enyalioides anisolepis*, one of the three new species discovered in the Andes of Ecuador and Peru. Its body plus tail length is 35 cm. Credit: Dr. Omar Torres-Carvajal

When the authors looked at DNA evidence, there were no doubts that the specimens collected recently belonged to three undescribed species of woodlizards.

"I started working with woodlizards in 2006 as part of my postdoc at the Smithsonian Institution under the direction of Kevin de Queiroz. At that time only seven species of woodlizards had been described, and they were recognized in the literature as one of the less diverse groups of South American lizards. During the last few years we doubled the number of known [species](#) of woodlizards, showing that the diversity of these conspicuous reptiles had been underestimated. That more than half of the diversity of a group of large, dragon-looking reptiles from South America has been discovered in recent years should be heard by people in charge of conservation and funding agencies," said Dr. Torres-Carvajal.

More information: Torres-Carvajal O, Venegas PJ, Queiroz K (2015) Three new species of woodlizards (Hoplocercinae, Enyalioides) from northwestern South America. *ZooKeys* 494: 107-132. [DOI: 10.3897/zookeys.494.8903](https://doi.org/10.3897/zookeys.494.8903)

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