

WWF: 52 New Species Discovered on Borneo

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Scientists have discovered at least 52 new species of animals and plants this past year on the island of Borneo. The discoveries, described in a new WWF report, include 30 unique fish species, two tree frog species, 16 ginger species, three tree species and one large-leafed plant species.

"The more we look the more we find," said Stuart Chapman, WWF International Coordinator of the Heart of Borneo Program. "These discoveries reaffirm Borneo's position as one of the most important centers of biodiversity in the world and why conservation there is so important."

Some of the creatures new to science include: a miniature fish, the world's second smallest vertebrate measuring less than a third of an inch in length and found in the highly acidic blackwater peat swamps of the island; six Siamese fighting fish, including one species with a beautiful iridescent blue-green marking; a catfish with protruding teeth and an adhesive belly which allows it to literally stick to rocks; and a tree frog with striking bright green eyes. The new ginger plants more than double the number of the *Etilingera* species found to date.

Several of these new species were found in the "Heart of Borneo," an 84,000 square mile mountainous region about the size of Kansas that is covered with equatorial rainforest in the center of the island. Large areas of the forest are at risk from destructive logging and expanding rubber, oil palm and pulp plantations. Since 1996, deforestation across Indonesia has increased to an average of 7,700 square miles each year, an area slightly smaller than Vermont. Today only half of Borneo's original

forest cover remains.

"The remote and inaccessible forests in the Heart of Borneo are one of the world's final frontiers for science," said Adam Tomasek, director of WWF-US's Borneo & Sumatra Program. "Certainly, many new species are yet to be discovered there. These forests are also vital because they are the source of most of the island's major rivers, and provide life sustaining freshwater and other ecosystem services."

At a meeting of the U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity held last March in Curitiba, Brazil, the three Bornean governments' Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia and Malaysia declared their commitment to support an initiative to conserve and sustainably manage the Heart of Borneo.

Source: World Wildlife Fund

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