

# Two new mammals found in Indonesian 'lost world'

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Papuan tribesmen are seen in this file photo. Scientists from CI and the Indonesia Institute of Science (LIPI) visited the Foja Mountains in Indonesia's Papua in June 2007, following a first trip in late 2005 that saw them discover dozens of new plants and animals, CI said in a statement.

A tiny possum and a giant rat were recorded by scientists as probable new species on a recent expedition to Indonesia's remote and virtually unknown "Lost World" in the pristine wilderness of western New Guinea's Foja Mountains.

Conservation International (CI) and Indonesia Institute of Science (LIPI) scientists were accompanied by the first film crew to obtain footage of the region and its wildlife on an expedition to the Fojas in June 2007. A National Geographic photographer/scientist and a CBS News camera crew joined the team as they returned to the mountains. CI and LIPI

scientists discovered dozens of new plants and animals on their first expedition to the region in late 2005. An account of the 2007 expedition was aired on the CBS News program, “60 Minutes” on Dec. 16.

“It’s comforting to know that there is a place on earth so isolated that it remains the absolute realm of wild nature,” said CI Vice President Bruce Beehler, who led the expedition. “We were pleased to see that this little piece of Eden remains as pristine and enchanting as it was when we first visited.”

The Foja Wilderness is part of the great Mamberamo Basin, the largest unroaded tropical forest in the Asia Pacific region. As the global community searches for solutions to climate change, large untouched forested areas such as these will become more and more valuable as essential carbon sinks.

The cutting and burning of tropical forests worldwide emits at least 20 percent of total global greenhouse gases. Protecting these forests minimizes the impact of climate change while providing direct benefits to local populations, such as fresh water, clean air, food, seed dispersal, pollination and sources of medicines.

The Indonesian Government has declared the region a National Wildlife Sanctuary, and CI continues to work with the government and local communities to build on this conservation success and ensure even greater protection of the area.

During the June expedition, the team documented two mammals, a *Cercartetus pygmy* possum, one of the world’s smallest marsupials, and a *Mallomys* giant rat, both currently under study and apparently new to science. They also recorded the mating displays of several rare and little-known birds for the first time.

“The giant rat is about five times the size of a typical city rat,” said Kristofer Helgen, a scientist with the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. “With no fear of humans, it apparently came into the camp several times during the trip.”

The film crew obtained the first film documentation of several spectacular birds found in Foja, capturing on tape the full courtship displays of the golden-fronted bowerbird (*Amblyornis flavifrons*) and of the black sicklebill bird of paradise (*Epimachus fastuosus*).

They also recorded the “lost” Bird of Paradise – *Parotia berlepschi* (known as Berlepsch’s six-wired bird of paradise), and the newly described wattled smoky honeyeater (*Melipotres carolae*), both known only from the Foja Mountains.

CI and LIPI plan another expedition back to the Foja Mountains in late 2008 or 2009. This proposed expedition will seek to survey the summit forests of the highest peak, and the little-studied lower montane elevations. They expect to find additional new species of frogs, mammals, butterflies, and plants.

Source: Conservation International

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