

New, rare and threatened species discovered in Ghana

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Scientists exploring one of the largest remaining blocks of tropical forest in Western Africa discovered significant populations of new, rare and threatened species underscoring the area's high biological diversity and value.

The findings from a 2006 expedition to Ghana's Atewa Range Forest Reserve (Atewa) led by Conservation International's Rapid Assessment Program (RAP) are presented in a report made public today.

The RAP discoveries include a Critically Endangered frog species (*Conraua derooi*) whose presence in Atewa may represent the last viable population in the world; an unusually high 22 species of large mammals and six species of primates including two species of global conservation concern: Geoffroy's pied colobus (*Colobus vellerosus*) and the olive colobus (*Procolobus verus*); 17 rare butterfly species; six bird species of global conservation concern including the brown-cheeked hornbill (*Bycanistes cylindricus*) and the Nimba flycatcher (*Melaenornis annamarulae*) (first time recorded in Ghana); and nine species new to science: a spider tick whose lineage is as old as the dinosaurs and eight species of katydids. (See a more detailed list of findings at the end of this release.)

Researchers also observed the reserve to be under pressure from illegal timber harvesting and bushmeat hunting. Mining exploration activities may pose a future threat, as the reserve contains gold and bauxite deposits.

“Atewa harbors one of the healthiest and most important ecosystems in Western Africa and is the crown jewel of Ghana,” said Leeanne Alonso, a Conservation International (CI) senior scientist who heads the RAP program. “This is an SOS to create with local communities and other stakeholders viable economic development options that also protect Atewa’s valuable natural resources.”

Between June 6 – 24, 2006, a team of 22 scientists, post-graduate students and assistants from Ghana and abroad surveyed the 58,472 acre (23,665 hectare) Atewa tract in south-eastern Ghana, just two hours from the capital Accra. The scientists found an intact forest ecosystem, which is unusual and significant for West Africa, where most forests are highly fragmented and disturbed.

The RAP, sponsored by Alcoa World Alumina LLC, provides information for policymakers and other stakeholders in deciding how to balance development with protecting important biodiversity that benefits local communities and the global ecosystem.

Established as a national forest reserve in 1926, and since as one of Ghana’s Globally Significant Biodiversity Areas, Atewa’s importance has long been recognized because it contains the headwaters of three river systems, essential sources of domestic, agricultural and industrial water for local communities and many of Ghana’s major population centers, including Accra.

In their final report, scientists called for the government to upgrade the area’s protection status such as to a National Park, create of a buffer zone around the park and develop a management plan that includes conversation measures and economic development strategies compatible with conservation goals.

The report points to eco-tourism as an optimal industry to develop

because of Atewa's beauty, richness in species and close proximity to the capital city. Another solution cited is Payment for Ecosystem Services or carbon credits. The economic values of the services provided by Atewa would be calculated and payments for these services made to the communities as a mechanism to protect the forest and watershed.

Source: Conservation International

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