

## Dracula fish, bald bird among strange new species

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Handout picture from the University of Melbourne via the Wildlife Conservation Society shows the "bald" Bulbul bird discovered in Laos' Savannakhet province. Dracula fish, a bald songbird and a seven-metre (23 feet) tall carnivorous plant are among several unusual new species found in the Greater Mekong region last year, researchers said Wednesday

Dracula fish, a bald songbird and a seven-metre (23 feet) tall carnivorous plant are among several unusual new species found in the Greater Mekong region last year, researchers said Wednesday.

Other new finds among the 145 [new species](#) include a frog that sounds like a cricket and a "sucker fish", which uses its body to stick to rocks in fast flowing waters to move upstream, according to conservation group WWF.

With fangs at the front of each jaw, the "dracula minnow" is one of the more bizarre new species found in 2009 in the Mekong River region, which comprises Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam and China's Yunnan Province.

Discovered in a small stream in Myanmar, it is largely translucent and measures up to 1.7 centimetres long.

It is not yet known whether the species is endemic to a single ecosystem within Myanmar, or spread throughout the region as a whole.

Other bizarre discoveries include the Bare-Faced Bulbul bird, which is bereft of feathers on the face and side of the head and has pale blue skin on the rear of the head and around the eyes. It lives in sparse forest on limestone karsts in central Laos.

Among newly recorded plants, the *Nepenthes bokorensis* plant, found in southern Cambodia, has a climbing length of up to seven metres, with pitchers that trap ants and other insects for food.



Graphic on newly discovered species in the Greater Mekong region, which comprises Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam and China's Yunnan

Province. 145 new species were discovered in the Mekong region, according to a WWF report, including the lipstick gecko and the "dracula minnow", which has fangs at the front of each jaw line.

"The rate of discovery in the Mekong is almost without equal globally," WWF regional conservation director Stuart Chapman told AFP.

"That's attributed to the enormous geographical and climatic range within the region, going from [high altitude](#) to dense tropical forests through to some of the richest freshwater in the world," he said.

"Undoubtedly this region is one of the richest in terms of its biodiversity, but it's also one of the most threatened."

The Greater Mekong region is home to some of the planet's most endangered wild species including tiger, Asian elephant, Mekong dolphin and Mekong giant catfish, said the World Wide Fund For Nature.

WWF has warned the Mekong giant catfish -- one of the world's biggest freshwater fish -- could be driven to extinction if plans to build hydropower dams on Southeast Asia's longest river go ahead, blocking spawning grounds.

"We need to keep one of the treasure troves of the world properly conserved," said Chapman.

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