

Seven new species of mammals discovered on Luzon

June 20 2011

A group of American and Filipino biologists have discovered seven previously unknown species of mammals in the Philippines, increasing the number of native mammals known from Luzon Island (excluding bats) from 42 to 49 (17 percent).

The formal descriptions of the seven [species](#), all of which are members of the genus *Apomys*, were published on 20 May in *Fieldiana*, the peer-reviewed journal of The Field Museum, where the project is based. The nine co-authors included biologists from the University of the Philippines, the Philippine National Museum, Conservation International-Philippines, Utah [Museum of Natural History](#), and Florida State University.

"These animals are part of the rich biological heritage of the Philippines", said Dr. Theresa Mundita Lim, Director of the Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau, Department of the Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). "The forests where they live are crucial watershed areas for Manila and many other cities. Protecting their mountain forest habitat is good for them and for people." The DENR is a collaborator of the project, providing assistance at field sites and co-organizing conferences on wildlife and conservation.

All of the species are forest mice, and each species lives only in a small part of Luzon. According to Dr. Lawrence Heaney from The Field Museum, project leader and lead author of the publication, "These are wonderful little mice that live in forested regions high in the mountains.

Although they are often abundant, they actively avoid humans and rarely cause any harm. They prefer to eat earthworms and seeds on the forest floor."

Two of the new species live only in the Zambales Mountains (on Mt. Tapulao), two live only on Mt. Banahaw (south of Manila), two only in the Mingan Mountains of Aurora Province, and one lives only in the Sierra Madre of northeastern Luzon.

"It is extraordinary that so many new species of mammals remain to be discovered in the Philippines," according to Danilo Balete, leader of the project's field team. "In the past 10 years we've published formal descriptions of 10 other species, and other biologists have described five more. And we are nowhere close to the end of our discoveries. The Philippines may have the greatest concentration of unique species of animals of any country in the world."

Dr. Scott Stepan, co-author and head of the laboratory at Florida State University where the DNA portion of the study was conducted, said, "The Philippines is an ideal place to study the evolution of animal diversity, even better than the famous Galapagos Islands. These animals have been evolving in the Philippine archipelago for millions of years."

Mr. Romeo Trono, Country Executive Director for Conservation International - Philippines, said, "Protecting land and marine resources is key to maintaining healthy ecosystems which deliver ecosystem services such as food, clean water, health, tourism and cultural benefits and stable climate which are vital to the very survival of every Filipino. Although small in size, these little animals are part of our biodiversity which forms the basic foundation of healthy ecosystems."

M. Josefa Veluz, biologist at the Philippine National Museum and co-author of the study, pointed out that the new species from the Sierra

Madre and Mt. Banahaw live within protected areas, but those from the Mingan Mountains and Zambales do not. Logging, expansion of agriculture, and mining all have an impact on wildlife and watersheds, she said.

Provided by Field Museum

Citation: Seven new species of mammals discovered on Luzon (2011, June 20) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-06-species-mammals-luzon.html>

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