

# Spectacular discoveries in New Guinea

June 27 2011, by Karl Malakunas

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This photo provided by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) on June 27, shows a large green tree-dwelling frog, *Litoria dux*, that was discovered on the northern side of the Huon Peninsula. A frog with fangs, a blind snake and a snub-nosed dolphin are among the more than 1,000 new species recently found on the incredible Melanesian island of New Guinea, according to WWF.

A frog with fangs, a blind snake and a round-headed dolphin are among more than 1,000 new species recently found on the incredible Melanesian island of New Guinea, environment group WWF said.

Scientists made the astounding discoveries, which also included a river shark and dozens of butterflies, on New Guinea at a rate of two a week from 1998 to 2008, WWF said in a new report on the island's natural habitat.

"This report shows that New Guinea's forests and rivers are among the richest and most biodiverse in the world," said WWF's Western Melanesia programme representative, Neil Stronach.

New Guinea, divided between Indonesia in the west and Papua New Guinea to the east, has one of the world's least spoilt and most stunning ecosystems.

Its rainforests are the third biggest in the world after the Amazon and the Congo, and, while the island covers just 0.5 per cent of the Earth's landmass, it contains up to eight percent of the world's species, according to WWF.



This photo provided by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) on June 27, shows a

snub-finned dolphin, *Orcaella Heinsohni*, in an undisclosed location in the waters south of Papua New Guinea. A frog with fangs, a blind snake and a snub-nosed dolphin are among the more than 1,000 new species recently found on the incredible Melanesian island of New Guinea, according to WWF.

What was previously known about New Guinea's biodiversity was already breathtaking, such as the world's biggest butterfly -- with a 30-centimetre (12-inch) wingspan -- and giant rats that can grow up to a metre long.

Scientists believe that one square kilometre (247 acres) of the island's lowland rainforest may contain as many as 150 [bird species](#), according to WWF.

The 1,060 species confirmed by scientists as new discoveries between 1998 and 2008 are believed to have only scratched the surface of New Guinea's dazzling ecosystems.

"Such is the extent of New Guinea's biodiversity that new discoveries are commonplace even today," WWF said in its report, titled "Final Frontier: Newly Discovered Species of New Guinea".

One of the most notable finds documented in the WWF report was a round-headed and snub-finned dolphin, which swims in protected, shallow coastal waters near rivers and creek mouths.

Discovered in 2005 in Papua New Guinea, it was the first new dolphin species recorded anywhere in the world in three decades, and is now known to also exist in Australia, WWF said.



This photo provided by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) on June 27, shows a blue-eyed spotted Cuscus, *Spilocuscus Wilsoni*, in an undisclosed location in Papua New Guinea. A frog with fangs, a blind snake and a snub-nosed dolphin are among the more than 1,000 new species recently found on the incredible Melanesian island of New Guinea, according to WWF.

Another of the 12 mammals found over the decade was an anteater named in honour of British naturalist Sir David Attenborough, Sir David's Long-beaked Echinda or, scientifically, *Zaglossus attenboroughi*.

One of the 134 frogs discovered was dubbed *Litoria sauroni* because its striking red and black spotted eyes reminded scientists of the evil character Sauron in the "Lord of the Rings" movies.

Another new frog was notable because of its tiny size -- just one centimetre in length, while one had vampire-like fangs.



Nine snail [species](#), some so colourful as to be almost unrecognisable from the backyard-garden-type variety, were among the 580 new invertebrates discovered.

One of the snails was bright yellow, while another was green and yellow.

Among the other new invertebrates was a brightly coloured apricot crayfish, part of the family of creatures called "yabbies" in Australia and some other parts of the world, which was nine to 12 centimetres long

New fish totalled 71, with a kaleidoscope of colours, including one in the coral reefs of Milne Bay in Papua New Guinea that thrilled scientists with its dazzling blue hue.



This photo provided by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) on June 27, shows a monitor lizard, *Varanus Macraei*, in an undisclosed location in Papua New Guinea. A frog with fangs, a blind snake and a snub-nosed dolphin are among the more than 1,000 new species recently found on the incredible Melanesian

island of New Guinea, according to WWF.

WWF said the most extraordinary freshwater discovery was a 2.5-metre-long river shark found in [Papua New Guinea](#) that has since also been located in northern Australia.

Of the 43 reptiles discovered, one could claim to be the most innocuous snake in the world -- it was just 12-14 centimetres long, had scales over its eyes so that it could not see, could not bite and had no venom.

But WWF said the excitement of all the [new discoveries](#) had been tempered by the fact that, like in the [Amazon](#) and Borneo rainforests, human actions were destroying New Guinea's [natural habitat](#) at an "alarming rate".

Some of the growing threats it listed were illegal and unsustainable logging, forest conversion for palm oil plantations, mining, road construction and unsustainable fishing.

"These environmental threats are exacerbated by global climate change which is increasing the number of fires within forests and savannas, erosion, and seawater incursion into coastal habitats," WWF said.

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