Indigenous peoples take action to conserve nearly half of Suriname

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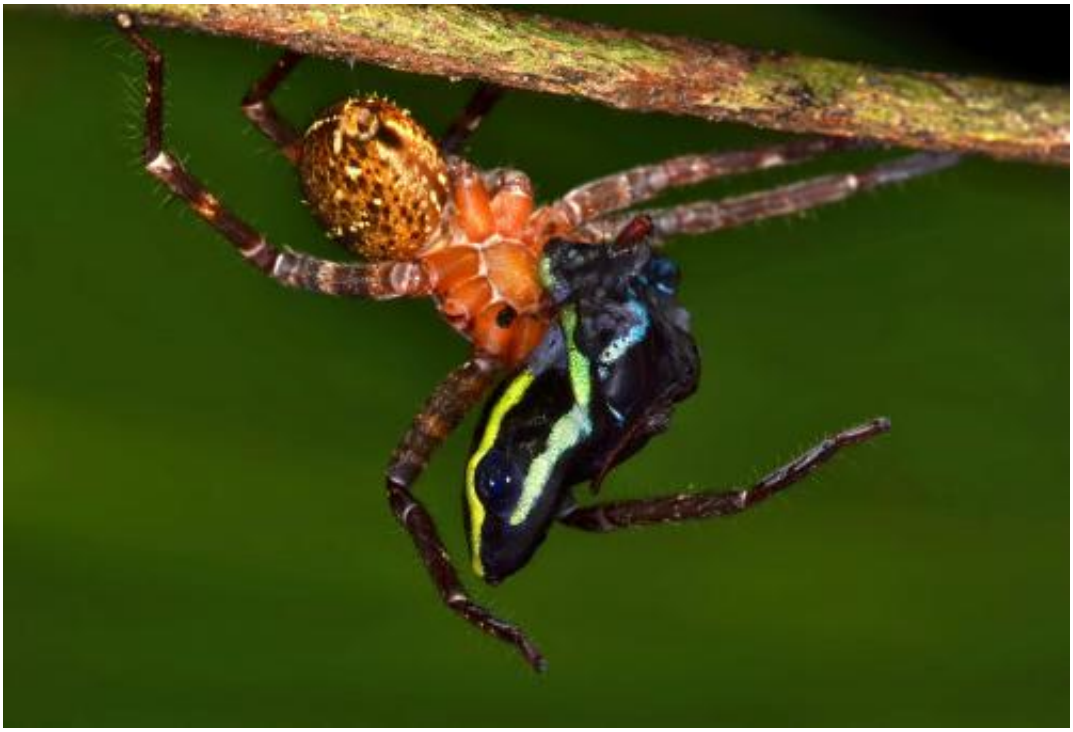


One of the joys of working in diverse tropical forests is that you never know what you will find, especially if you take a walk at night. Here, in an extremely rare event, a large wolf spider eats a toxic poison-dart frog (Amereega trivitatta)

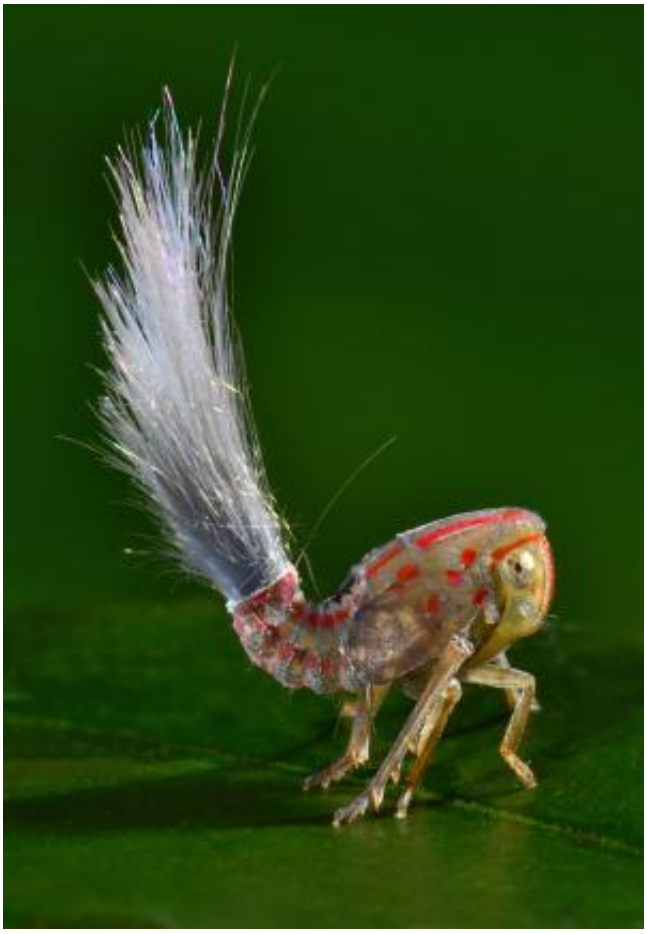
The 72,000 square kilometer indigenous conservation corridor covers some of the most pristine, intact and remote rainforests in the world; it is the first in Suriname declared by indigenous peoples

Paramaribo, Suriname/Arlington, Va. USA—Today, the Trio and Wayana Communities presented a declaration of cooperation to the National Assembly of Suriname that announces an indigenous conservation corridor spanning 72,000 square kilometers (27,799 square miles) of southern Suriname. The declaration, led by these indigenous communities and with the support of Conservation International (CI) and WWF Guianas, comprises almost half of the total area of Suriname. It includes some of the most pristine and intact forests on the planet, which are essential for the country's climate resilience, freshwater security, and green development strategy.

"As people we need earth's resources to live, the forest provides this," said Captain Shedde of the Trio village of Alalapadu, "If we think and care about our future generations now is the time to act and work together to preserve our nature."

Suriname is often regarded as the greenest country in the world, illustrated by one of the lowest ecological footprint per capita. The south of Suriname is located in the least disturbed part of the Amazon Biome and Guiana Shield. As such, it is part of the largest tract of continuous, near pristine, tropical forest in the world, critical for maintaining the balance of life on our planet. The indigenous conservation corridor links to one of the largest networks of Protected Areas in the tropics, which includes Parc Amazonien in French Guiana and Tumucumaque in Brazil.

This region generates over 60% of Suriname's water annually. It includes just under half of the nation's forest, which stores an estimated 11 Gigatons of carbon in total and absorbs more than 8 million tons carbon annually. In 2012, a CI Rapid Assessment Program (RAP) expedition assessed the biodiversity in this remote region. The RAP team documented 1,378 species, including plants, ants, beetles, katydids, fishes, amphibians, birds and mammals – 60 of which were new to science.



Many planthopper species exude waxy secretions from the abdomen, and these sometimes form long strands, such as can be seen in this photo. The long waxy strands may provide protection from predators - it could be that they fool a predator into attacking the wrong part of the insect, and the wax breaks off while the insect jumps to safety. The juvenile planthopper in this photo is only about 5 mm long, and was exceedingly difficult to photograph!

"The indigenous people believe they borrow the lands from their grandchildren and we as a country, ought to be doing the same," said John Goedschalk, Director of CI's Suriname office. "The country of Suriname has a serious focus on trying to preserve important parts of our forests and protect headwaters. A conservation corridor, guarded by the

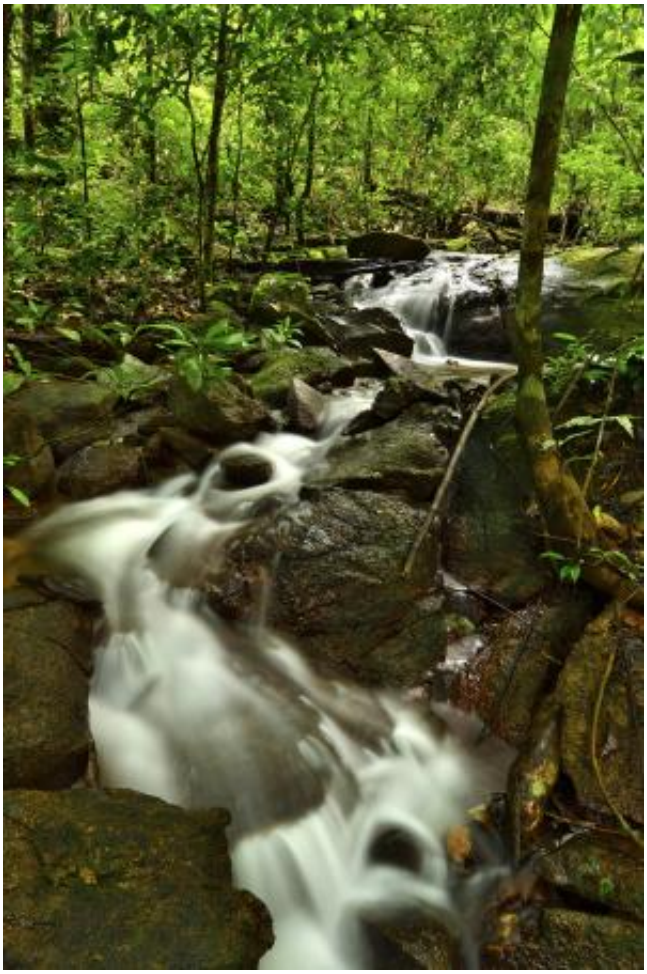
indigenous people of the forest, is a truly Surinamese solution that is in the interest of all our peoples".

Despite the region's isolation, the Trio and Wayana have seen increased pressure on the forests from logging and mining activities. These two indigenous communities have taken the initiative to act as stewards of the their forest home, and will protect its significant amount of natural resources including primary forest, biodiversity, freshwater resources and cultural heritage.

The bright colors of the false coral snake (Erythrolamprus aesculpi) lend it protection from predators, even though it lacks the deadly venom of the true coral snake. This is one of the 19 snake species encountered on the expedition, which included a true coral snake, a deadly fer-de-lance viper, and a species (Pseudoboa sp.) potentially new to science.

Protection of this area will ensure continuity in the supply of clean water and important advantages for the use of water downstream, including renewable energy, agriculture, tourism, and drinking water. Its protection will also help the people in southern Suriname adapt to survive in the face of climate change.

"We are very excited about the progress that has been made during Suriname's first ever extensive multi-stakeholder dialogue on the protection of South Suriname," said Laurens Gomes, country manager for WWF Guianas. "This dialogue has unlocked multiple perspectives on how important this area is for Suriname and the world. The signed declaration provides a foundation for continued collaboration and partnership."



A waterfall near the base of Kasikasima Mountain. The riparian zone along the region's numerous streams and rivers provides important habitat for an enormous diversity of terrestrial and aquatic species.

Provided by Conservation International