

University of East Anglia researcher finds rare Vietnamese rabbit

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A rare and elusive rabbit has been found, held and photographed by a researcher from the University of East Anglia (UEA). The Annamite Striped rabbit, found in the forests of Laos and Vietnam, was first documented by rabbit expert Dr. Diana Bell and colleagues from UEA's School of Biological Sciences in the journal *Nature* in 1999. It has rarely been seen since. Researcher Sarah Woodfin, who is studying for a Masters in Applied Ecology and Conservation at UEA, set out on a three-month expedition to track the recently discovered rabbit and study

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Under the tutelage of Dr Bell and in collaboration with a team from WWF Vietnam, she embarked on her trip to study the rabbit - which is named after its home in the Annamite mountains.

She said; "I didn't expect that I would ever see one up close. I thought that if I was very lucky, I might see one from a distance in the forest. I certainly never expected that I would have the opportunity to hold one of these magnificent animals. I was utterly delighted.

"My team and I encountered the rabbit completely by chance on the first night of my trip.

"It was found hopping along a stream bank eating vegetation. One of my

team members managed to catch it and brought it back to camp, where we were all able to have a good look at it.

"My first feeling was shock. I recognized it as a striped rabbit as soon as I saw it, as they are very distinctive, but I couldn't believe that they had caught one.

"The rabbit was very handsome, with dark stripes against a pale gold background and a red rump. We were able to take some measurements and photographs before we released it back into the forest.

"I was completely awed by the encounter.

"I had never expected to get so close to the species but it was necessary to take its measurements. The rabbit was bigger than I had anticipated, but light and delicate.

"I have kept pet rabbits since I was five years old so I knew how to handle it safely. It was a lifetime experience."



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Images of the rabbit had previously been caught by motion sensitive 'camera traps'. Sarah travelled to the WWF conservation area to survey and analyse the rabbit's habitat and vegetation. She plans to use this information to model the potential distribution of the rabbit which will help further conservation efforts.

She added: "Nothing is known about the Annamite Striped rabbit and it is absolutely fascinating to think that anything I discover about it could be new.

"It is genetically very distinct from other rabbit species. Sadly there is a possibility that this species could be at risk of extinction due to deforestation and hunting. It is therefore extremely important that we understand as much as possible about this species so that we can evaluate its conservation status and implement appropriate [conservation](#) measures."

Provided by University of East Anglia

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