

Dark and marked: Strikingly colored new fleshbelly frog from the Andean cloud forest

August 6 2015



A *N. madrevelva* fleshbelly frog shows a large irregularly shaped white mark, stretching from its chest to its belly. Credit: Dr. Vanessa Uscapi

Carrying itself around with a dark brown mask on its face and a broad shapeless white mark on its chest and belly, a frog had been jumping

across the Peruvian cloud forests of the Andes unrecognised by the scientific world. Now, this visibly distinguishable species has been picked up by Dr. Catenazzi of Southern Illinois University and his team from its likely only locality, a cloud forest near Cusco in Peru, at 2350 m elevation by Drs. Catenazzi, Uscapi and May. Their research is published in the open-access journal *ZooKeys*.

The new fleshbelly [frog species](#), called *N. madreSelva*, was discovered by Peruvian researcher Vanessa Uscapi in January 2011 amid leaf litter in the humid montane forest of the Andes. Locally abundant and active during the day, the leaping amphibian was found to be small of size and leading a predominantly terrestrial life. It is likely that the new species has restricted distribution, inhabiting the upper watersheds in the valleys adjacent to the locality where it has been discovered.

The name "madreSelva", which translates to "mother jungle" from Spanish, honours the efforts of local conservation initiatives, such as the local ecotourism lodge Madre Selva and the ecological project Sircadia, that aim at protecting the delicate and biologically rich montane forest ecosystems in the region. The new frog is locally abundant in parts of the forest that are protected from logging.

Described by the authors as "striking", the colouration is what visibly differentiates the new [frog species](#) from its relatives. Most noticeably, it stands out with the wide irregularly shaped white mark on black background all across, stretching from the creature's chest down to its belly. A brown splash on its head forms a distinguishable dark facial mask.

Because of the frog's limited habitat, the scientists fear that the species is threatened by a large number of risks, including deforestation, diseases and the agricultural activities in the region. However, as for the moment, the frog has been proposed by the researchers to be classified as "Data

Deficient" in the [IUCN Red List](#), until new data regarding its distribution become available.



A *N. madrevelva* freshbelly frog shows dark brown facial mask. Credit: Dr. Vanessa Uscapi

Being often neglected by explorers, small [amphibian species](#) like this fleshbelly frog are at high risk of extinction, claim the authors. "It is therefore imperative to document the highly endemic amphibian faunas of wet montane Andean forests as a first step towards designing a network of natural reserves that maximizes protection of amphibian biodiversity," they insist.



A *N. madrevelva* freshbelly frog is in its natural habitat, leaf litter in a high-altitude forest. Credit: Dr. Vanessa Uscapi

More information: Catenazzi A, Uscapi V, von May R (2015) A new species of *Noblella* (Amphibia, Anura, Craugastoridae) from the humid montane forests of Cusco, Peru. *ZooKeys* 516: 71-84. [DOI: 10.3897/zookeys.516.9776](https://doi.org/10.3897/zookeys.516.9776)

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