

# The need to name all forms of life: 60 new species of dragonflies described from Africa

December 10 2015

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Swordbearer Emperor *Anax gladiator*. Credit: KD Dijkstra

As dragonflies are good indicators of water quality, knowledge of these insects is important. The discoveries were published by three odonatologists (dragonfly experts) led by guest researcher KD Dijkstra of the Naturalis Biodiversity Center in a 230-page issue of the journal *Odonatologica* on December 1st 2015.

All [dragonflies](#) are bound to [freshwater](#), which occupies less than 1% of the planet's surface. Nonetheless, it harbours 10% of all animal species. As water is used so intensively, life is most threatened there. The beauty and sensitivity of dragonflies provides a perfect symbol of freshwater health and biodiversity. As freshwater is critical to both nature and mankind, so is [knowledge](#) of its dragonflies.

With this research, the number of dragonfly species known in Africa increases at once by almost 10%, from 700 to 760 species. Species discovery gives insight into the mystery and richness of nature. Only by knowing what lives we know what to protect. This research shows how essential recognising and naming species, the science known as taxonomy, is.

"The current emphasis on molecular research creates the impression that the undiscovered life is inconspicuous or hidden, but each of our new species is colourful and easy to identify. It's a matter of going outside and knowing what you're looking for," says Dijkstra. "It's a biologist's greatest importance today. Names introduce species to humanity. All awareness, conservation and research of nature starts with the question: which species is that?"

Species description requires much work in the field and museum. "Just now nature is under historic pressure, such research is getting less support," says Dijkstra. "Nine of our 60 dragonflies were discovered by an employed biologist, all others in a teacher's and environmental consultants' free time. We see this effort as a call to science and the

public: make the search for unknown life a priority before it's too late. In freshwater alone a quarter million species could be gone before they are known. Nature needs more explorers now!"



KD Dijkstra is pictured in Congo. Credit: KD Dijkstra

Freshwater is under exceptional pressure in Africa. Of the predicted population growth this century from seven to eleven billion, four fifths is expected in Africa. However, most biological research is still done in western countries. That knowledge must be shared and expanded with websites, handbooks, field guides and training. "An American private foundation is helping us take the first steps for African dragonflies.

Developing expertise will increasingly require support from individuals and charities. Do we want the world to be aware and know everything about the ferns, corals, dragonflies and millions of other [species](#) with which we share the planet?"



*Africocypha varicolor* species is from Gabon. Credit: KD Dijkstra

Provided by Naturalis Biodiversity Center

Citation: The need to name all forms of life: 60 new species of dragonflies described from Africa (2015, December 10) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-12-life-species-dragonflies-africa.html>

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