

# Lack of data increases risk to species' survival

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A new species discovered in Madagascar. Credit: Dr Dave Roberts

Incomplete information is leaving many endangered species off conservation priorities.

The majority of species are poorly known, many only from a handful of [museum specimens](#). This makes determining the [conservation](#) status of these species difficult, with many ending up being assigned as Data Deficient under the IUCN Red List. This 'Data Deficient' labelling then prevents them from appearing on the Red List as endangered or at risk and so prevents them from receiving the conservation attention they urgently require.

Dr David Roberts of the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology (DICE), in the School of Anthropology and Conservation at the University of Kent, and Dr Lucas Joppa of Microsoft Research and an honorary researcher at DICE, studied the [herbarium specimens](#) of orchids from Madagascar; famed for Darwin's comet orchid. Their research found that species described more recently have smaller ranges and occupancies, fewer specimens and greater perceived extinction risk.

In their paper published in the journal *Diversity and Distribution*, the authors found that as more specimens were collected and new locations found, the known distribution of a species increases rapidly, and that this increase in known distribution was faster than collection at random. This suggests newly discovered species and yet to be discovered [species](#) are rare and likely to be at risk of extinction.

**More information:** David L. Roberts et al. Threatened or Data Deficient: assessing the conservation status of poorly known species, *Diversity and Distributions* (2016). [DOI: 10.1111/ddi.12418](https://doi.org/10.1111/ddi.12418)

Provided by University of Kent

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