

Finding the real treasure of the Incas: Two new frog species from an unexplored region

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Yáñez Rain frog
Pristimantis yanezi



The new rain frog species *Pristimantis yanezi*. Credit: Santiago Ron

Inaccessibility and mysticism surrounding the mist-veiled mountains of

the central Andes make this region promising to hide treasures. With an area of 2197 km², most of the Llanganates National Park, Ecuador, is nearly unreachable and is traversed only by foot. However, fieldwork conducted by researchers from the Museo de Zoología at Catholic University of Ecuador resulted in the discovery of a more real and tangible gem: biodiversity.

Among other surprises, during their expeditions the researchers discovered two [new species](#) of [rain frogs](#), formally named *P. llanganati* and *P. yanezi*. The new [species](#) are characterized by the spiny appearance typical of several species inhabiting montane forests. The study was published in the open access journal *ZooKeys*.

The new rain frogs belong to the megadiverse genus *Pristimantis*. They are direct-developing frogs, which means that they lack a tadpole stage and therefore do not undergo metamorphosis.

The Neotropical Andes houses a spectacular radiation of *Pristimantis*, especially in the Montane Forests of the eastern slopes of the Ecuadorian Andes. The species richness of this genus is still underestimated as a consequence of their cryptic morphology and the still sparse amphibian inventories in unexplored regions such as the Llanganates National Park.

The discovery reminds the authors of a mystic local legend dating from the 16th century, when the Inca Empire fell into the hands of Spanish conquerors. Word has it that in exchange for the young emperor's life, Atahualpa, Incas offered to fill an entire room with tons of gold. However, the Spaniards broke their promise and the emperor was executed. A small group of loyal Incas led by General Rumiñahui decided to hide both, the mummy of Atahualpa and the gold, in the depths of the jungle of the Llanganates National Park.



Llanganates Rain frog
Pristimantis llanganati

The new rain frog species *Pristimantis Llanganati*. Credit: Santiago Ron

More information: María Navarrete et al, Two new species of frogs of the genus *Pristimantis* from Llanganates National Park in Ecuador with comments on the regional diversity of Ecuadorian *Pristimantis* (Anura, Craugastoridae), *ZooKeys* (2016). [DOI: 10.3897/zookeys.593.8063](https://doi.org/10.3897/zookeys.593.8063)

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