

Scientists discover new, frightening-looking creature in Florida, of course

December 13 2018, by Roger Simmons



It's as long as a snake, is spotted like a leopard, has two small arms with gills sticking out of its body and it lives in the swamps of Florida's panhandle. What is it?

It's a new creature that was discovered by scientists, who announced their findings last week. They say it's a type of legless salamander called

a siren—and this [new species](#) is being officially called *Siren reticulata*, or the Reticulated Siren. Others have referred to it as a leopard eel, even though it's not really an eel.

Scientists say the Reticulated Siren is among the largest [species](#) discovered in the United States in the last century.

"In this study we use morphological and [genetic evidence](#) to describe a previously unrecognized species from southern Alabama and the Florida panhandle," the scientists wrote in their paper, published in the journal *Plos*.

"We name this species the Reticulated Siren, *Siren reticulata*. Future studies will enable more precise phylogenetic information about *S. reticulata* and will almost surely reveal additional undescribed species within the family."

NationalGeographic.com, which interviewed one of the authors of the scientific paper, said stories about this strange swamp creature have been passed around the Florida and Alabama area for years.

"It was basically this mythical beast," said David A. Steen, who works at the Georgia Sea Turtle Center.

"What immediately jumps out about the reticulated siren that makes it so different from currently-recognized species is its dark and reticulated (or net-like) pattern," Steen told National Geographic. "It also seems as though they have a disproportionately-smaller head, as compared to other sirens."

In the report for *Plos*, it was explained that while Steen was trapping turtles at Eglin Air Force Base in 2009, when he captured the first specimen of the newly discovered Reticulated Siren.

Despite efforts to try to find more specimens, the scientists reported, their efforts proved futile for five years. "However, on 8 June 2014, three more specimens were collected in a freshwater marsh adjacent to Lake Jackson in Walton County, Florida."

The Reticulated Siren was so hard to find because it spends its entire life below the surface of the water, the scientists said.

"*S. reticulata* has an elongate, eel-like body shape, two forelimbs, no eyelids, a lateral line, enlarged external gill fimbriae associated with gill slits, and a horny beak in place of the premaxillary teeth typical of other salamanders," the scientists said in their description of the creature.

The Reticulated Siren has only been confirmed in three locations so far—Eglin AFB in Florida's Okaloosa County, Lake Jackson and in the Fish River near Baldwin County, Ala.

The scientists who wrote about the discovery—Sean P. Graham, Richard Kline, Crystal Kelehear and Steen—want their work on the Reticulated Siren to lead to more research about the new creature.

"We hope the data we present here inspire others to prioritize further study of this group of fascinating amphibians and fund associated research," they wrote in their paper.

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