

# 'Zombie frog' discovered: 3 new species described from the narrow-mouthed frog family

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*Synapturanus mesomorphus*. Credit: Senckenberg/Hölting

Together with an international team, Senckenberg scientists have described three new frog species from the northern Amazon region. The

animals from the genus *Synapturanus* spend their lives buried underground and are therefore still virtually unexplored. The researchers assume that the species diversity of this genus from the family of narrow-mouthed frogs is at least six times higher than previously known. The study will be published in the journal *Zoologischer Anzeiger*.

The normally small and rather plump-looking members of the narrow-mouthed frog family have an almost worldwide distribution and usually live hidden underground. "The calls of the male frogs can only be heard after or during heavy rainfall. This means that we herpetologists have to dig the animals out of the ground with our bare hands—usually completely soaked ourselves—in order to identify them," explains Dr. habil. Raffael Ernst of the Senckenberg Natural Historical Collections in Dresden, and he continues, "This somewhat eerie and muddy scenario also inspired us to use the name *Synapturanus zombie* for one of the newly discovered [species](#) from the narrow-mouthed frog genus *Synapturanus* in the Amazon region."

The orange-spotted "zombie [frog](#)," which measures just under 40 millimeters, is one of three newly described species discovered by Ernst and an international team in the tropical rainforests of Guyana, French Guiana, and northern Brazil, an area known as the Guiana Shield. All of the frogs belong to the genus *Synapturanus* and were classified as new species based on 12 different morphological characteristics, having previously been genetically identified as undescribed species. "Until now, little scientific attention has been paid to this genus," Ernst explains, citing the animals' habits: "The frogs' habitats are difficult to access, and their ranges are very small; moreover, the animals hide underground, and their calls are rather difficult to differentiate."



Synapturanus zombie. Credit: Antoine Fouquet



The newly described frog measures barely 40 millimeters in length. Credit: Antoine Fouquet

The herpetologist from Dresden and his colleagues therefore intend to pay closer attention to this [genus](#). "We assume that there are six times as many *Synapturanus* species as we have described so far. Thus, much work remains to be done—not least since we are not yet able to conclusively assess the risk status of the species due to the complex data situation," adds Ernst as an outlook.

**More information:** Antoine Fouquet et al, Comparative osteology of the fossorial frogs of the genus *Synapturanus* (Anura, Microhylidae) with the description of three new species from the Eastern Guiana

Shield, *Zoologischer Anzeiger* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jcz.2021.05.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcz.2021.05.003)

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