

# New Madagascar species discovered weekly, many already endangered

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Madagascar's unique habitats are facing numerous threats, but deforestation is among the most serious. Credit: Jan Koehler/WWF Madagascar

Scientists in Madagascar discovered more than 615 species, including 41 mammals between 1999 and 2010 but many of the exciting and colourful creatures are already endangered.

Madagascar's unique habitats are facing numerous threats, but deforestation is among the most serious, with experts saying that the island has already lost 90% of its original forest cover.

New finds since 1999 include 385 plants, 42 invertebrates, 17 fish, 69 amphibians, 61 reptiles and 41 [mammals](#).

Treasure Island: New biodiversity in Madagascar, a WWF report

compiling discoveries made in one decade shows the immense diversity of the natural wealth on the world's fourth largest island, but offers one more dramatic reminder of the increasing threats to this fragile environment.

“This report shows once again how unique and irreplaceable the different ecosystems in Madagascar hosting all these different species are”, says Nanie Ratsifandrihamanana, WWF Madagascar's Conservation Director.

“WWF works every day to establish a representative protected area network and to promote sustainable livelihood alternatives to allow people in Madagascar to live in harmony with the natural world surrounding them”.

Although just found, many of the species, including Berthe's Mouse Lemur, are already endangered due to rapidly progressing environmental degradation, driven mainly by deforestation.

The magnificent Tahina Palm (*Tahina spectabilis*), a massive fan palm which flowers only once in a lifetime with a spectacular, giant inflorescence that forms from the centre of the crown, is undoubtedly among the most exciting scientific discoveries. After fruiting, the palm dies and collapses.

But for all those who know Madagascar thanks to its famous lemurs, one of the planet's most charismatic animals, the discovery of the Berthe's Mouse Lemur (*Microcebus berthae*) in 2000 was the most exciting news.

Weighing only 30 grams, the cute reddish-brown coloured creature resembling one of the characters of the blockbuster film Madagascar is not only the tiniest of the mouse lemurs but also the smallest primate in the world.

## Paradise in danger

One of the greatest tropical wildernesses left on Earth and home to some of the most spectacular wildlife, the island is home to 5% of the world's plant and animal species, of which more than 70% are found nowhere else on earth.

The wildlife includes the aye-aye, radiated and spider tortoises, marine turtles, flying fox, fossa, tenrec, chameleons, crocodiles and many others.

But this biodiversity paradise is in danger with many species on the brink of extinction. As deforestation and habitat fragmentation continue, so do erosion and sedimentation of coral reefs, leaving communities more vulnerable than ever. Droughts force people to abandon their fields and move towards the ocean where they practice unsustainable fishing methods causing fish stocks to dwindle away even faster.

In the aftermath of a coup in March 2009 and subsequent political turmoil, Madagascar's rainforests were pillaged for precious hardwoods, especially rosewood. Tens of thousands of hectares were affected, including some of the island's most biologically diverse national parks Marojejy, Masoala, Makira and Mananara.

These logging activities also resulted in the rise of commercial bush meat trade. Specialised restaurants in Madagascar's north sold lemur meat for as little as 3 Euro a plate. The political instability and increased crime rates, resulting in part increased poverty hurt the once flourishing tourism industry, one of very few livelihood options for people around national parks.

Among other discoveries was an exceptionally-coloured new snake species discovered in 2010 within Makira National Park, where illegal

logging has possibly reduced these snake populations already.

Scientists also discovered a new colour-changing gecko, resembling the bark of a tree. It can quickly change its colour from a subtle brown to a colourful bright blue during courtship.

“These spectacular new species show what’s at stake in Madagascar and what can be lost if we don’t save it. WWF [Madagascar](#) will put all its effort and money towards protecting priority land- and seascapes and priority [species](#)” says Nanie Ratsifandrihamanana.

“By protecting the environment and the island’s biodiversity, we are helping both the local communities and national government to attain more sustainable long-term development goals, and helping the world to protect irreplaceable natural resources.”

Provided by WWF - Conservation news

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