

First record of large-antlered muntjac in Quang Nam, Vietnam, in the wild

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Large antlered muntjac. Credit: Leibniz IZW, WWF Vietnam, USAID Song Thanh Nature Reserve

Under a biodiversity monitoring and assessment activity supported by the US Agency for International Development (USAID), scientists and conservationists of the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research (Leibniz-IZW) and WWF-Vietnam captured photographs of one of the rarest and most threatened mammal species of Southeast Asia, the large-antlered muntjac (*Muntiacus vuquangensis*), in Quang Nam province, central Vietnam. Prior to this milestone, this species had only been camera trapped in three protected areas in all of Vietnam since the year 2000. The new records from Quang Nam—which include photographs of both a male and a female—provide new hope for the continued survival of a species that is on the brink of extinction.

"It is amazing news," said Phan Tuan, Director of the Forest Protection Department of Quang Nam in Vietnam "The two individuals are both mature and of reproductive age. These images prove that the [species](#) still survives in Quang Nam province and give us hope that there might even be a breeding population."

The large-antlered muntjac was discovered by scientists in 1994 and is found only in the Annamites mountain range bordering Vietnam and Lao People's Democratic Republic. Illegal hunting, mainly accomplished by the setting of wire snares, has decimated the species across its range. Snaring pressure is apparently high in the forests of central Vietnam. From 2011 to 2017, for example, government rangers and WWF Forest Guards removed more than a hundred thousand wire snares from the Thua Thien Hue and Quang Nam Saola Nature Reserves. In 2016, in response to the snare-driven decline of the species the status on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species of the large-antlered muntjac was changed from Endangered to Critically Endangered.

Conservation stakeholders are continuing efforts to protect large-antlered muntjac in the wild. However, in recognition of the overwhelming pressure that the species faces and the fact that its populations are now critically low, the government and international NGOs are planning to establish a captive insurance population for this species and the saola (*Pseudoryx nghe inhensis*). The saola is another recently-discovered endemic ungulate that is even rarer than the large-antlered muntjac and may be now approaching extinction.

Dr. Benjamin Rawson, the Conservation Director of WWF-Vietnam, notes: "Large-antlered muntjac do not currently exist in captivity, so if we loose them in the wild, we loose them forever. Scientists are racing against time to save the species. Addressing the snaring crisis to protect wildlife in the forests of central Vietnam and setting up captive assurance populations are vital if we are to succeed."

In addition to large-antlered muntjac, other camera trap surveys funded by USAID also documented other conservation priority species including Owston's civet (*Chrotogale owstoni*), Asiatic black bear (*Ursus thibetanus*), Annamite striped rabbit (*Nesolagus timminsi*), and pangolin (*Manis spp.*).

"Finding these rare and beautiful species gives new hope for Vietnam's precious biodiversity treasures," says Nguyen Van Thanh, who led the field survey. Thanh is both a Ph.D. student at the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research and a WWF Russell E. Train Fellowship recipient. "Although populations of all ground-dwelling mammals and birds have declined from snaring, our results show that the forests of Quang Nam province still harbor globally-significant biodiversity" Thanh adds. The findings of this study will help the Forest Protection Department of Quang Nam to develop better management and law enforcement plans to save these species and their habitats.

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