

Extraordinary treefrog discovered in the Andes of Ecuador

3 January 2019



An adult of the recently discovered species *Hyloscirtus hillisi*. Credit: Gustavo Pazmiño, BIOWEB Ecuador

A new treefrog species was discovered during a two-week expedition to a remote tabletop mountain at Cordillera del Cóndor, a largely unexplored range in the eastern Andes.

"To reach the tabletop, we walked two days along a steep terrain. Then, between sweat and exhaustion, we arrived to the tabletop where we found a dwarf forest. The rivers had blackwater and the frogs were sitting along them, on branches of brown shrubs similar in color to the frogs' own. The frogs were difficult to find, because they blended with their background," Alex Achig, one of the field biologists who discovered the new species comments on the hardships of the expedition.

Curiously, the [frog](#) has an extraordinary, enlarged claw-like structure located at the base of the thumb. Its function is unknown, but it could be that it is used either as a defence against predators or as a weapon in fights between competing males.

Having conducted analyses of genetic and morphologic data, scientists Santiago R. Ron, Marcel Caminer, Andrea Varela, and Diego Almeida from the Catholic University of Ecuador

concluded that the frog represented a previously unknown species. It was recently described in the open-access journal *ZooKeys*.



Unlike other frogs, the new species has a claw at the base of the thumb. The function of this unusual structure is still unknown. Credit: Gustavo Pazmiño, BIOWEB Ecuador

The species name, *Hyloscirtus hillisi*, honors Dr.

David Hillis, a member of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, who discovered three closely related frog species in the same genus in the 1980s, while conducting a series of field trips to the Andes of southern Ecuador. Throughout his career, Dr. Hillis has made significant contributions to the knowledge of Andean amphibians and reptiles.

Despite being newly described, *Hyloscirtus hillisi* is already at risk of extinction. It has a small distribution range near a large-scale mining operation carried out by a Chinese company. Habitat destruction in the region has been recently documented by the NGO Amazon Conservation.

More information: Santiago R. Ron et al, A new treefrog from Cordillera del Cóndor with comments on the biogeographic affinity between Cordillera del Cóndor and the Guianan Tepuis (Anura, Hylidae, *Hyloscirtus*), *ZooKeys* (2018). DOI: [10.3897/zookeys.809.25207](https://doi.org/10.3897/zookeys.809.25207)

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