Report highlights Amazon's rich diversity

By **Matthew Knight** for CNN
October 27, 2010 -- Updated 1028 GMT (1828 HKT)

VIDEO

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- New report highlights the amazing biodiversity of the Amazon rainforest
- Scientists have discovered over 1,200 new species over the past decade
- New species of bald parrots, poisonous frogs, anacondas, river dolphins and spiders found

London, England (CNN) -- More than 1,200 new species of plants and animals have been discovered in the Amazon rainforest over the past decade according to a new report.

"Amazon Alive! A Decade of Discoveries 1999-2009," published Tuesday by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), showcases the extraordinary diversity housed in the world's biggest rainforest which spans eight South American countries.

Six-hundred-and-thirty-seven new species of plant were found during the period, as well as nearly 500 new fish and amphibians, including 24 new poison dart frogs.

A four-meter long anaconda snake -- native to Bolivia and the first of its genus to be identified since 1936 -- was among 55 new reptile species

discovered, and a Bolivian river dolphin was one of 39 new species of mammals

CLOSE

Video: New species in the Amazon

CLOSE

Video: 1,200 new species discovered

RELATED TOPICS

- Nature and the Environment
- Global Climate Change
- Mammals
- Marine Animals
- Environmental Protection
- WWF

A brightly colored bald parrot (Pyrilia aurantiocephala) was one of the highlights of 16 new bird species.

Jim Leape, WWF international director general told CNN: "This is report is really intended to bring home the richness of the Amazon forest and how much is there. The Amazon is the single most important place on Earth for biodiversity -- it holds ten percent of the world's known species."

The list of new discoveries amounts to more than the combined total of new species found in Borneo, the Congo Basin and the Eastern Himalayas during the same time period, the report says.

Nearly one fifth of the Amazon rainforest has been cut down in the past 50 years, Leape says. This is largely due to increased global demand for soya, beef and, more recently, biofuels.

"All of us in the choices we make everyday in our supermarkets are actually part of this picture," Leape said.
"On a more basic level, this is a place that stores perhaps more than 100 billion tons of carbon and it absorbs a lot of the carbon we put into the air. So it's hugely important to the future of the world's climate."
Governments from around the world are currently meeting at the United Nations biodiversity summit in Nagoya, Japan with the aim of setting new targets to stem eco-system loss.

U.N. summit sends S.O.S. on biodiversity

The talks are an important opportunity to "galvanize global action to save nature," Leape says.
"I think what you have in front of 193 countries is a plan for the next ten years that, if acted upon, would really make a difference."