

Micro-wallaby found in Indonesia

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Scientists exploring a remote Indonesian forest say they have uncovered a collection of new species, including the world's smallest known wallaby, a Pinocchio-nosed frog and a yellow-eyed gecko.

An international group of scientists found the species in the remote Foja Mountains on the island of New Guinea in late 2008 and released the details, including pictures, on Monday ahead of the International Day for Biological Diversity on May 22.

Many of the species found during the survey are believed to be new to science, Conservation International and the National Geographic Society said, including several new mammals, a reptile, an amphibian, and a dozen insects.

The discoveries come just as scientists warn of the growing threat of accelerating loss of species as the planet warms and forests and other habitats are destroyed to feed a growing human population.

"While animals and plants are being wiped out across the globe at a pace never seen in millions of years, the discovery of these absolutely incredible forms of life is much needed positive news," said Conservation International's Bruce Beehler, a participant on the expedition.

"Places like these represent a healthy future for all of us and show that it is not too late to stop the current species extinction crisis."

The Foja Mountains are in the Indonesian province of Papua on the island of New Guinea and cover a large area of undeveloped and undisturbed rainforest.

Conservation International said the frog's Pinocchio-like protuberance on its nose pointed upwards when the male called but pointed downwards when he was less active.

The team also found a tame, woolly rat, a bent-toed gecko with yellow eyes, a new imperial pigeon and a tiny forest wallaby that is believed to be the smallest member of the kangaroo family documented in the world.

Other discoveries recorded during the survey included a new blossom bat, which feeds on rainforest nectar, and a small tree-mouse.

Scientists are becoming increasingly concerned over the rate of species loss on the planet and point out the huge benefits of forests, river systems, wetlands and oceans to human livelihoods and economies.

Recent reports show that world governments failed to meet the targets agreed to in 2002 to reduce the rate of loss of biodiversity by 2010, which was declared by the United Nations the International Year of Biodiversity.

Negotiators from around the globe meet in Japan in October to discuss new targets to stem biodiversity loss for the next 40 years.

- Reuters

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