

NEW SPECIES FOUND IN TANZANIA



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Research fronted by conservation NGO Frontier has revealed 15 new species of amphibians and a chameleon species in one of the most important biodiversity hotspots in the world. The findings are a result of biological surveys carried out in the South Nguru Mountains, Tanzania.

Three of the new species discovered by scientists working for Frontier include the largest forest toad ever described in the genus *Nectophrynoides*, a new species of

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tree frog with red eyes which was added to the genus *Leptopelis*, and a burrowing toad with a distinctive long snout, of the genus *Probreviceps*.

The forest toad, which has yet to be given an official scientific name, is very large with massive glands, making it distinct from known species, and it appears in a variety of colours including orange and black, yellow and green, and red. This species appears to be restricted to only a few remote valleys deep in the South Nguru forests. However, in the valleys

where it is found it is the commonest amphibian, making its presence known with a distinctive ‘echoing drip’ or ‘plink’ call.

“As soon as we saw this toad we knew it was something special,” said Nisha Owen who led Frontier’s research programme in South Nguru. “It’s such a strange looking beast, and its call is very distinctive.”

All findings from the research project were reported last month in the journal *Acta Herpetologica* and a conservation plan is now under way



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With its distinctive red eyes this new species of frog in the genus *Leptopelis* resembles other similar species, but is found at much higher altitudes than its relatives.

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This new species of toad is the largest ever found in the genus *Nectophrynoides*. Its bizarre looks are likely to be coupled with a strange breeding cycle; studies of other *Nectophrynoides* species have discovered that they are the only types of toad which give birth to live young instead of laying eggs.

It might look like a bit of a bruiser, but this newly discovered species of burrowing toad (*Probreviceps* sp.) is under threat from deforestation in its mountain home.

in the area to address the threats to these unique animals, as the Nguru South area is not only home to colourful amphibians, but also houses more than 50 villages, a majority of which are dependent on agriculture. As a result, the local fauna faces severe threats as the agricultural land encroaches on the forests.

“It’s really important that these forests are protected from further agricultural degradation”, says Owen, who is now carrying out doctoral research into human-wildlife

conflicts at the University of Leeds. “The montane forests of Tanzania hold some of the highest levels of biodiversity in the world, but they are also under severe threat from deforestation.”

The research was an international collaboration between Frontier and the University of Dar es Salaam, the Tridentine Museum of Natural Science in Italy and the Tanzania Forest Conservation Group. Frontier’s research was funded by the

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Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund as part of a wider survey programme in the Eastern Arc.

Frontier has nearly 20 years of experience in project management in the field of science and since 1989 has carried out research in many of the world’s most significant biodiversity hotspots. Other work includes terrestrial and marine habitat mapping and investigation of the ecology of many different species of interest. ●
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