



Amazing Discoveries in the Amazon: New Species Found Every 3 Days Over Last Decade

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Between 1999 and 2009, more than 1,200 new species of plants and vertebrates were discovered in the Amazon biome –or one new species every 3 days– confirming the Amazon as one of the most diverse places on Earth, says a WWF report released this week at UN Convention on Biodiversity (COP 10) in Nagoya, Japan.

The report clearly shows the incredible diversity of life in the Amazon. It also serves as a reminder of how much we still have to learn about this unique region, and what we could lose if we don't change the way we think about development, and promote conservation at a regional level that provides economic, social, and environmental benefits to people in the region and those within the Amazon's far-reaching climatic influence, added Francisco Ruiz, Leader of WWF's Living Amazon Initiative.

The new species outlined in *Amazon Alive!: A Decade of Discoveries 1999-2009* include 637 plants, 257 fish, 216 amphibians, 55 reptiles, 16 birds and 39 mammals. Among some of the fabulous findings are the first new anaconda species identified since 1936. Described in 2002 from Bolivia's north-eastern Amazon province, and then found also in the floodplains of Bolivia's Pando province, the 4 meter long *Eunectes beniensis* was initially believed to be the result of hybridization between green and yellow anacondas, but was later determined to be a distinct species:



Eunectes beniensis

One of the most extraordinary species, the *Ranitomeya amazonica*, a frog with an incredible burst of flames on its head, and contrasting water-patterned legs. The frog's main habitat is near the Iquitos area in the region of Loreto, Peru, and is primary lowland moist forest. The frog has also been encountered in the Alpahuayo Mishana National Reserve in Peru:



Ranitomeya amazonica

A member of the true parrot family, the *Pyrrhuloxia aurantiocephala* has an extraordinary bald head, and displays an astonishing spectrum of colors. Known only from a few localities in the Lower Madeira and Upper Tapajos rivers in Brazil, the species has been listed as 'near threatened', due to its moderately small population, which is declining owing to habitat loss.

The Amazon River dolphin or pink river dolphin was recorded by science in the 1830s, and given the scientific name of *Inia geoffrensis*. In 2006, scientific evidence showed that there is a separate species –*Inia boliviensis*– of the dolphin in Bolivia, although some scientists consider it a subspecies of *Inia geoffrensis*. In contrast to the Amazon River dolphins, their Bolivian relatives have more teeth, smaller heads, and smaller but wider and rounder bodies:



Inia boliviensis

A blind and tiny, bright red new species of catfish that lives mainly in subterranean waters. Found in the state of Rondonia, Brazil, the fish *Phreatobius dracunculus* began to appear after a well was dug in the village of Rio Pardo, when they were accidentally trapped in buckets used to extract water. The species has since been found in another 12 of 20 wells in the region:



Phreatobius dracunculus

Endangered

Although most of the Amazon region remains fairly undisturbed, the threats to it are rapidly increasing. **During the last 50 years humankind has caused the destruction of at least 17% of the Amazon rainforest** – this is an area greater than the size of Venezuela, or twice the size of Spain.

One of the main causes of this transformation is the rapid expansion in regional and global markets for meat, soy and biofuels, increasing the demand for land. It is estimated that **80 percent of deforested areas in the Amazon are occupied by cattle pastures.**

In addition, unsustainable development models, rapid regional economical growth, and increasing energy demands, are also impacting on the Amazon.

The Amazon's forests not only house the most outstanding diversity of life on Earth, but also store 90-140 billion tonnes of carbon. Releasing even a portion of this through further forest loss and land use change, would accelerate global warming significantly compromising life on Earth as we know it.

“Urgent and immediate action is needed if we are to avoid this frightening scenario”, said, Francisco Ruiz. The fate of the Amazon –and of its species whether known or yet to be discovered- depends on a significant shift in the current way development is embraced by all Amazon countries, added Ruiz.

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