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New frog species found in hunt for old ones

By Richard Black Environment correspondent, BBC News



The attractive rocket frogs carry a toxic chemical cargo, though this new species is less toxic than most

A search for frogs believed to be extinct has instead led scientists to discover some new ones.

Three species hitherto unknown to science have been found in Colombia.

They include a poison-secreting rocket frog and two toads. All three are tiny and tend to be most active in daytime, which is unusual for amphibians.

However, the same expedition to Colombia failed to find the species it was hoping to rediscover, the Mesopotamia beaked toad.

The disappointment provoked by that non-discovery turned to glee when the conservation scientists came across the three new species.

The 3-4cm red-eyed toad, discovered at an altitude of 2,000m, evoked particular fascination.



Life without larvae: this tiny toad apparently needs no tadpole stage

"I have never seen a toad with such vibrant red eyes," said Robin Moore from Conservation International, the scientist who set up the rediscovery project.

"This trait is highly unusual for amphibians, and its discovery offers us a terrific opportunity to learn more about how and why it adapted this way."

The other new toad is also tiny - less than 2cm long - with a beak-shaped head that Dr Moore compared to the snout of Montgomery Burns, the villain of *The Simpsons* TV series.

George Meyer, a long-time *Simpsons* writer and amphibian enthusiast, commented: "The toad's imperious profile and squinty eyes indeed look like Monty Burns."

The reason why it has not been identified previously is probably because the species skips the tadpole stage, instead producing toadlets that resemble the fallen leaves of the forest floor in which they live.

The third newcomer is a rocket frog, a member of the poison dart family - though not as poisonous as many of its cousins.

The amphibian search, co-ordinated by Conservation International along with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, began in August and is the first co-ordinated attempt to look for species believed to be extinct.

Expeditions have been mounted in 19 countries in search of 100 lost species.

So far, three have been found: a Mexican salamander not seen since its discovery in 1941, a frog from the Ivory Coast last observed in 1967, and another frog from Democratic Republic of Congo not seen since 1979.



This new toad lives at altitude - beyond that, scientists know nothing about it. Despite the discoveries and rediscoveries, the team emphasises that overall, the global outlook for amphibians is still bleak.

The remainder of species targeted by the current search have remained undetected, suggesting that they are indeed extinct.

And the latest Red List of Threatened Species, released during the UN biodiversity summit last month, put 41% of amphibians on the danger list, with most of the threats continuing to intensify.