

Wanted lost species: blind salamander, tap-dancing spider and ‘fat’ catfish

A Texas-based group has drawn up a new list of as part of its quest to find species lost to science and possibly extinct



A Texas blind salamander, an endangered species. Photograph: Eric Gay/AP

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A blind salamander, a tap-dancing spider and a “fat” catfish that has been likened to the Michelin man are among a list of vanished species that one US-based conservation group is aiming to rediscover in the wild and help protect.

The Texas-based group, called Re:wild, has drawn up a new list of the “**25 most wanted lost species**” as part of its quest to find species lost to science and possibly extinct.

The most wanted list includes the “fat” catfish, which has not been seen in its known habitat in Colombia since 1957. The species is the only freshwater catfish in the world with rings of fatty tissue wrapped around its body, leading to it

being described by scientists who have previously searched for it as “the closest a fish could get to the Michelin man”.

Michael Edmondstone, communications and engagement lead at Shoal, a conservation group for freshwater species, said the organization is “tremendously excited by the prospect of the fish being found”. He added: “Everybody is hoping to learn more about it and, ultimately, put the right measures in place to ensure it can thrive for future generations.”

The Togo mouse, lost from Togo and Ghana, is a ground-dwelling mammal that is still recognized by locals who call it “Yefuli” despite its last confirmed appearance being in 1890, while a blind amphibian that dwells in underground aquifers in the US, called the Blanco blind salamander, has not been seen since 1951.

“The Blanco blind salamander has achieved near-mythical status among herpetologists, cave biologists and conservationists,” said Andrew Gluesenkamp, director of conservation at the San Antonio Zoo.

Meanwhile, the Fagilde’s trapdoor spider, known for building horizontal traps and tap dancing in front of potential mates, is being sought after seemingly vanishing from its home range in Portugal in 1931. There are species of plant on the new list, including the big puma fungus, not seen in South America since the 1980s, and pernambuco holly, a tree species in Brazil not recorded since 1838.

Re:wild, which has the actor Leonardo DiCaprio as a founding board member, is also continuing to search for Attenborough’s long-beaked echidna, named in honor of Sir David Attenborough, which hasn’t been spotted in 60 years and is one of just five existing species of monotreme, which is a group of egg-laying mammals found in Australia and New Guinea. A tree-dwelling kangaroo from Indonesia and a pink-headed duck from India are also being sought by the organization.

Since starting its search for lost species in 2017, Re:wild has confirmed the rediscovery of eight species through expeditions and scientific analysis, including a type of giant tortoise in the Galapagos islands and the world’s largest bee, **found in Indonesia**.

There are many more species lost to science, however, with an estimated 2,200 species across 160 countries missing for 10 years or more. The loss of habitat, pollution, rampant hunting and climate change is fueling what scientists have described as **the Earth's sixth mass extinction**, and the first to be driven by one species, in this case humans.

“When we launched the search for lost species, we weren’t sure if anyone would rediscover any of the wildlife on our most wanted list,” said Barney Long, Re:wild’s senior director of conservation strategies. “Each new rediscovery has reminded us that we can find hope in even the most unlikely situations and that these stories of overlooked, but fascinating, species can be a powerful antidote to despair.”

Long said the organization was now looking to conduct research expeditions and devise conservation programs for rediscovered species.