

Discovering unknown species or the hidden face of mammals

Manuel Ruedi, Thursday 11 august 2022



This Indian Sooty Minnow now has a new twin species alongside it, newly described from the forests of Sri Lanka (photo credit M. Ruedi, Geneva Museum).

The inventory of our planet's biodiversity is far from complete, since it is estimated that less than half of all living species have been recorded. It is therefore still possible to make new taxonomic discoveries, even among mammals!

A world in constant discovery

Much of this unknown biodiversity is found in the tropics, where the environments are the most diverse, particularly the rainforests. Among the known animal species (about 1.5 million), the lion's share is reserved for invertebrates. Among beetles, for example, no fewer than 400,000 species have been described by scientists to date. It is therefore not surprising that thousands of new insects are described each year throughout the world.

In this ocean of diversity, mammals look like Lilliputians with only 6,400 species described to date. Moreover, we often tend to believe that these furry animals are very well inventoried and that it is exceptional to discover new species. What is true for the larger ones is not necessarily true for the smaller ones (rodents, chiropterans, shrews and primates), which make up four fifths of the world's mammals. In fact, about 30 to 40 new species of mammals are described each year.

Three new mammal species described at the Natural History Museum of Geneva (MHNG)

The Museum's researchers are not to be outdone in this race to find unknown species: no less than 67 new species, 5 genera and even 2 new families have been discovered and described by Geneva systematists. The description of the last 3 mammal species «made in Geneva» has just been published in scientific journals. The first is a small bat living in the bamboo forests of northeastern India and named *Glischropus meghalayanus*. The second is also from this part of the world and is called *Miniopterus phillipsi*, also a chiropteran, named after a British explorer. The third, another small bat, is called *Rhinolophus namuli*, after the mountain in Mozambique where it was discovered in southern Africa.



This new species, weighing just 4 g and named *Glischropus meghalayanus*, lived hidden in the bamboo groves of northeast India (photo credit U. Saikia, ZSI)



The cranial characteristics of this rhinolophus made it possible to determine that this specimen from Mozambique belonged to a new species (photo credit M. Ruedi, Geneva Museum).

The description of new species protects biodiversity

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The three articles describing them are available below, as is the list of new mammals described by Museum scientists.

Finally, it should be noted that it is not always in the tropics that new mammals are described, since [in 2018, a researcher from the Museum described one living... in Switzerland!](#)

References:

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