

New Species Discovered Every Two Days in the Mekong



A new monkey, a self-cloning skink, five carnivorous plants, and a unique leaf warbler are among the 208 species newly described by science in the Greater Mekong region in 2010 and highlighted in a new WWF report, *Wild Mekong*.

While the report affirms the Mekong as a region of extraordinary biodiversity, WWF is calling on the six leaders from the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) meeting next week in Myanmar to put the benefits of biodiversity, and the costs of losing it, at the centre of decision-making and regional cooperation.

The Myanmar summit will endorse a new strategy guiding the next decade of economic cooperation among the GMS countries. WWF warns the Greater Mekong's valuable natural assets and species will continue to disappear without accelerated efforts to green the region's economies.

"Mekong governments have to stop thinking about biodiversity protection as a cost and recognise it as an investment to ensure long-term stability," said Stuart Chapman, Conservation Director of WWF Greater Mekong. "It is ultimately this natural capital upon which the Greater Mekong's prosperity is built."

Among the ten species highlighted in the WWF report is the snub-nosed monkey (*Rhinopithecus strykeri*). Found in Myanmar's remote and mountainous Kachin state, locals say the monkey can be spotted with its head between its knees in wet weather to avoid rain running into its upturned nose.

A staggering array of 28 reptiles was also newly discovered in 2010, including an all-female lizard (*Leiolepis ngovantrii*) in Vietnam that reproduces via cloning without the need for male lizards. Five

species of carnivorous pitcher plants were also discovered across Thailand and Cambodia, with some species capable of luring in and consuming small rats, mice, lizards and even birds.

"While the 2010 discoveries are new to science, many are already destined for the dinner table, struggling to survive in shrinking habitats and at risk of extinction," added Chapman.

The extinction of the Javan rhino in Vietnam, recently confirmed by WWF, is one tragic indicator of the decline of biodiversity in the region. The Mekong's wild places and wildlife are under extreme pressure from rapid, unsustainable development and climate change.

"The region's treasure trove of biodiversity will be lost if governments fail to invest in the conservation and maintenance of biodiversity, which is so fundamental to ensuring long-term sustainability in the face of global environmental change," concluded Chapman.

Wild Mekong spotlights 10 species newly identified by science, among the 145 plants, 28 reptiles, 25 fish, 7 amphibians, 2 mammals, and 1 bird all discovered in 2010 within the Greater Mekong region of Southeast Asia that spans Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam and the south-western Chinese province of Yunnan. The report reveals an average of one new species recorded by science

every two days in the region.

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