# Blind Huntsman Spider, Dragon Fish among Dozens of New Species in Myanmar

AP

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — A dragon fish with intricate, maze-like markings on every scale, a frog with rough, chocolate-colored skin and a ginger plant are among more than two dozen flora and fauna species found in Myanmar since it emerged from a half-century of military rule and isolation.

The World Wildlife Fund said June 5, 2014, the discoveries by global scientists in the last two years highlight the need to invest in conservation as the biologically diverse nation of 60 million revs up its economic engines and opens up to foreign investment.

Already, it is starting to succumb to many of the pressures felt by neighbors in Southeast Asia, from deforestation and illegal wildlife trade to mining and the development of hydropower.

The 26 plants and animals newly identified in Myanmar include a species of dragon fish, which are hugely popular in the Asian aquatic world. The so-called "scribbled arowana," is creating a buzz on the aquarium fish blogosphere because of its unheard-of complex, maze-like markings on every individual scale.

Previously unidentified by scientists, a ginger plant collected from a single region in the cloud forests of the western state of Rakhine had been hiding in plain sight at local markets, WWF said. And a chocolate-spotted frog, a member of the Amolops family, was discovered in a mountain range that stretches along Myanmar's western border and India.

Win Myo Thu, co-founder of the local environmental group EcoDev, believes

scientists have only scraped the surface of what is yet to be discovered in his country.

In part because Myanmar was cut off from the rest of the world for such a long time, limiting the ability to carry out a proper inventory, "there is a huge, huge knowledge gap," he said. "The more research that is done, the more species we are going to find."

He too worries about the impact economic development will have on the country's "biotreasures."

"Unfortunately, no one is paying attention to protecting biodiversity," he said. "They say OK, we will do this or that, but on ground it's an entirely different story."

Many of the national parks are protected, but only on paper.

The WWF said some of the more remarkable and charismatic discoveries made in 2012-13 elsewhere in the Mekong Delta region of Southeast Asia included:

- The Cambodian tailorbird — a small, dark warbler with an orange-red tuft on its head discovered, surprisingly, in that country's capital, Phnom Penh, during spot checks for the avian flu.
- A giant flying squirrel, its fur red and white, spotted initially by scientists at a bush meat market in Laos. In the same country, they found a species of huntsman spider, the first of its kind in the world without any eyes, something scientists say is attributable to living permanently without daylight.
- In Vietnam, a tiny, almost transparent fish that mates head-to head, its sex organs just behind its mouth. Scientists also found the Helen's flying frog, just 100 kilometers (60 miles) from Ho Chi Minh City, which glides between treetops using its large, webbed hands and feet.

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