

Lost Frogs, Found Frogs

By Russ Case

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The news of the world's declining amphibian populations has been a sad weight hanging over the heads of herp hobbyists for several years now. The reasons given for the decreasing numbers varies, and in some instances are still up for debate. The chytrid fungus has decimated its share of frogs. Environmental factors, such as the depletion of the ozone layer, have been cited as possible causes, too. But whatever the cause, frogs have been disappearing at an alarming rate.

Some good news has surfaced recently, however. More than 200 new frog species have been discovered in Madagascar. Isn't it great to know that it's still possible for this many species to be discovered? It makes you wonder what animals are still out there that are completely unknown to us.

Unfortunately, the political climate in Madagascar may not be to the newly discovered frogs' benefit. Here's a quote from the news release: "The political instability is allowing the cutting of the forest within national parks, generating a lot of uncertainty about the future of the planned network of protected areas," David Vieites, researcher at the Spanish National Natural Sciences Museum, said in a statement.

So even though these new species have been discovered, will their habitat remain? It's ironic that one way new species are discovered is because humans are working their way deeper and deeper into previously unexplored habitat in remote areas. It's exciting to learn that new frogs and other animals can be discovered, but sometimes you have to wonder at what cost? In some instances, especially if an animal is particularly rare, its discovery may halt the progression of the bulldozers. That's happened here in the U.S. (remember the spotted owl vs. the logging industry) but do you think it's as likely to happen as somewhere like Madagascar? Based on Vieites' comments above, I'm doubtful.

Let's hope the day comes when the world's frogs can catch a break without any strings attached.

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