

Beat: Miscellaneous

'Extinct' bat found in Papua New Guinea after 124 years

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USPA News - A species of big-eared bat that was not seen for more than a century and was thought to have gone extinct has been found in a forest in Papua New Guinea, researchers in Australia announced on Wednesday, just weeks after scientists re-discovered a lost snake species in Mexico. The New Guinea big-eared bat, which is a species of vesper bat, was first discovered in 1890 by Italian scientist Dr. L. Loria along the Kemp Welch River in British New Guinea, the British colony that is today southeastern Papua New Guinea.

The scientist was able to collect 45 specimens of the bat species, which was not seen since. But 124 years later, a team of researchers from the University of Queensland in Australia has managed to find one of the rare bats, which had been listed as "Possibly Extinct" on the Red List of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The specimen was found during a field expedition in the Abau District of southeastern Papua New Guinea. "The species was presumed extinct. We captured one individual about 120 kilometers (74 miles) east of the only previous known locality at Kamali," said researcher Dr. Luke Leung. He said the New Guinea big-eared bats are distinguished from all other Papua New Guinea bats by a combination of large ears and a simple nose-leaf located behind their nostrils. The IUCN, in its 2008 update on the New Guinea big-eared bat, did not exclude the possibility that the rare bat species was still alive in a very small population size with a small range size. But if alive, it said, the bat species would be threatened by habitat loss around human population centers in the Kamali District due to the reduction of area and quality of small rainforest patches in savanna woodland. "It roosts communally in lowland sclerophyll woodland habitat, although it is not known whether the species roosts in trees or in caves," the IUCN said in its 2008 update. "Even the general habitat is not known for certain, but is assumed to be either savanna woodland, and/or lowland rainforest patches in savanna woodlands." Ecological knowledge is sparse for much of Papua New Guinea's bat fauna, and the IUCN previously said that finding the New Guinea big-eared bat was "one of the highest priorities" for field surveys in the country. The lack of information on the region's bat fauna, however, makes species identification and conservation extremely difficult. "Further studies need to be done to establish whether the New Guinea big-eared bat is one of a small number of mammal species endemic to the south-eastern peninsula region, or if it occurs more widely," Dr. Leung said. "Many of the coastal lowland habitats throughout Papua New Guinea are among the most threatened in the country due to clearing for logging and agriculture, and more field surveys of local bat populations could assess the conservation status of the species and inform future strategies to ensure their preservation." Papua New Guinea is a recognized biodiversity hotspot, with seven percent of the world's species diversity located there. The rediscovery of the New Guinea big-eared bat comes just weeks after scientists announced they had found a mysterious species of snake that was not seen for nearly 80 years. The Clarion nightsnake, a nocturnal reptilian species, was first discovered on a remote Mexican island in 1936 but the species was able to elude scientists for decades during subsequent field studies, causing the 1936 discovery to be nullified.

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

UPA United Press Agency LTD

483 Green Lanes

UK, London N13NV 4BS

contact (at) unitedpressagency.com

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