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Two 'lost' animal species spotted in Palawan

'There are a lot of primary forests that have not been surveyed. What will await us there?'

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BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT. Cleopatra's Needle mountain in Palawan. Image courtesy Jonah van Beijnen

A group of researchers in Palawan "rediscovered" two species of endemic amphibians, the Palawan toadlet (*Pelophryne albotaeniata*) and the Malatgan River caecilian (*Ichthyophis weberi*) during their biodiversity survey at the Cleopatra's Needle, one of the island's highest mountains.

"It shows how unique the island is, that in the very small expedition, we were able to rediscover two amphibian species," Jonah van Beijnen, vice president for the non-profit environmental organization Centre for Sustainability, told Rappler.

The white-striped flathead Palawan toadlet is an endangered species of toad living on higher elevation, according to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).



SEEN AGAIN. The rediscovered Palawan Toadlet. Image courtesy Jonah van Beijnen

The healthy population of Palawan toadlets at the peak of Cleopatra's Needle could be an indication that there might be more of this species in other parts of Palawan.



together with other researchers found it on Mt. Matalingahan, Rizal town, in southern Palawan.



The rediscovered Palawan Toadlet (*Pelophryne albotaeniata*) climbing a tree trunk. Image courtesy Jonah van Beijnen

specimens. It is a wormlike amphibian living in tropical moist forests only in Palawan. It was initially found on Malatgan River in Iwahig, Palawan.

Brown, who was part of the expedition, said in an [earlier interview with Mongabay.com](#) that caecilians are very secretive animals.

Brown described the experience as an "exciting discovery."

Van Beijnen told Rappler, "This was one of the first 4 big expeditions that we organized. Besides, we also discovered new dragonflies, stick insects and plants which just shows how unique the island is. Quoting Rafe Brown, 'It's additional fuel for conservation.'"

He added, "There are a lot of primary forests that have not been surveyed. What will await us there?"

As of 2014, almost half, or around 45% of Palawan's forests remain intact. But according to Van Beijnen, 90% of Palawan's primary forests remain unprotected.



A compilation of photos of the Palawan toadlet. Image courtesy Jonah van Beijnen

"With the rapid urban development in Palawan, and the large-scale commercial projects proposed by the government, what will the future hold for these species?" asked van Beijnen.

During the research expedition, the team was able to see and record at least 14 reptile, 12 amphibian, and 65 bird species.

They were also able to spot several endemic mammal and insect species like dragonflies and damselflies – some of which, like the Palawan toadlet and the caecilian, have not been seen in a number of years.