

Brilliantly colored 'lost' salamander rediscovered after 42 years

by Shreya Dasgupta on 1 November 2017

- The striking, yellow-hued Jackson's climbing salamander was first reported to science in 1975, then never recorded again.
- But last month, a guard at a recently created amphibian reserve in Guatemala's Cuchumatanes Mountain range spotted a juvenile of the species while he was patrolling.
- Conservationists are excited because the salamander was "rediscovered" in a reserve especially created to help protect the habitat of amphibians like the Jackson's climbing salamander.

A "lost" species of salamander, feared extinct for more than 40 years, has been found again.

The Jackson's climbing salamander (*Bolitoglossa jacksoni*), also called the golden wonder because of its brilliant yellow color, was first made known to science in 1975. Since then, the species had never been recorded. But last month, the yellow-hued salamander was spotted once again in Guatemala's Cuchumatanes Mountain range.

Ramos León, a guard at a recently created amphibian reserve in the Cuchumatanes Mountain range was out patrolling when he came upon a juvenile of the species at the reserve's edge, according to a press release by the US-based non-profit Global Wildlife Conservation (GWC). He sent photographs of the salamander to Carlos Vasquez, curator of herpetology at the University of San Carlos of Guatemala, who then confirmed that the photographed individual was indeed the Jackson's climbing salamander.

For Vasquez, this discovery is especially significant. He has spent more than 30 years searching for the salamander, and earlier this year, he led a workshop training the reserve's guards on identifying the extremely elusive salamander.

“I explained to them how important this species is and I left a poster there so they could see a picture of the Jackson's climbing salamander every single day,” Vasquez, who is also the coordinator of the amphibian conservation program at local NGO and GWC partner FUNDAECO, said in a statement. “We had started to fear that the species was gone, and now it's like it has come back from extinction.”



The Jackson's climbing salamander was discovered by a guard at the Finca San Isidro Amphibian Reserve in Guatemala. Photo by Carlos Vasquez Almazan.

In April this year, the Global Wildlife Conservation announced the launch of a massive Search for Lost Species campaign that aimed to look for 25 of the world's “most wanted lost species” — species that have not been recorded in at least several decades. The Jackson's climbing salamander was part of this list. In fact, GWC had already planned an expedition to the Cuchumatanes Mountain range in January 2018 to look for the species.

The team is, however, very excited about the discovery, especially since conservation groups like GWC and the Rainforest Trust were instrumental in establishing the amphibian reserve in 2015 to help protect the habitat of amphibians like the Jackson's climbing salamander.

“I love this story because it conveys how protecting habitat gives species a fighting chance to survive on this planet,” Don Church, president of GWC, said in the statement. “This rediscovery can only be a good omen for the future of the Search for Lost Species campaign. It's a sign that if we get out there and work at it, many of these species can be found and saved.”

Jeremy Jackson, who first made the species known to science and after whom the species is named, is also delighted by the rediscovery. “The night I got the news from Carlos that *Bolitoglossa Jacksoni* had been rediscovered, I flew off the couch where I’d been falling asleep, let loose a string of expletives (in a good way), and did a little happy dance,” Jackson said. “I’m so pleased to hear that it was a guard protecting the preserve who found this beauty. My congratulations and thanks to Carlos and all who have worked to make the reserve a reality.”



Jackson's climbing salamander. Photo by Carlos Vasquez Almazan.

Article published by Shreya Dasgupta