

MENTAL FLOSS



CARLOS VASQUEZ ALMAZAN

Presumed Extinct, the Rare 'Golden Wonder' Salamander Reappears After 42 Years

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After pulling a disappearing act for 42 years, a rare, vibrantly colored amphibian called Jackson's climbing salamander (*Bolitoglossa jacksoni*) was recently spotted in Guatemala's Cuchumatanes Mountains, according to LiveScience. This marks just the second time it's ever been recorded in the wild, and the third species member ever spotted.

Jackson's climbing salamander is nicknamed the "golden wonder" for its bright yellow color, and it has a thick black dorsal streak that extends from its head to its tail. Jeremy Jackson, along with his friend Paul Elias, first spotted the unique critters in 1975 while hiking through the Cuchumatanes. Their trip also led to the discovery of two additional new species, the long-limbed salamander (*Nyctanolis pernix*) and the Finca Chiblac salamander (*Bradytriton silus*).

All three creatures turned out to be exceedingly elusive. Expeditions in 2009 and 2010 yielded sightings of the long-limbed salamander and the Finca Chiblac salamander, but Jackson's climbing salamander—which Jackson had originally found hiding beneath bark in a cloud forest, according to ScienceAlert—remained hidden.

In April 2017, the nonprofit group Global Wildlife Conservation added the long-lost amphibian to its Top 25 "most wanted" species list. The list was part of the organization's Lost Species initiative, which aimed to re-discover—and potentially save—rare creatures that hadn't been seen for years, if not decades. Global Wildlife Conservation planned a January 2018 search expedition to Guatemala to look for Jackson's climbing salamander, but a Guatemalan man named Ramos León ended up beating them to the punch.

León, a guard at the Finca San Isidro Amphibian Reserve in the Cuchumatanes (also called the Yal Unin Yul Witz Reserve), was on patrol in October 2017 when he saw—and photographed—a young Jackson's climbing salamander. León then sent the picture to Carlos Vasquez, a curator of herpetology at USAC University in Guatemala.

Vasquez, who's credited with rediscovering both the Finca Chiblac salamander and the long-limbed salamander, had been looking for Jackson's climbing salamander since 2005. He taught León and other guards how to recognize the amphibian—which likes to hide in moss, leaves or bark—and even hung a poster of the creature at the reserve.

"We had started to fear that the species was gone, and now it's like it has come back from extinction," Vasquez said in a news statement. "It's a beautiful story and marks a promised future for the conservation of this special region."

He wasn't the only one who was thrilled to hear the news. "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 in a news release.

Finca San Isidro Reserve was established in 2015 by an international team of wildlife preservation groups. Their goal was to protect the species' habitat, and it looks like their efforts have paid off.

"With the Cuchumatanes Range under threat—a well-known epicenter for endangered amphibians and one of the highest global conservation priorities—in 2015 we acted swiftly to support the purchase and protection of critical properties," said Paul Salaman, the CEO of Rainforest Trust, in a statement. "And we are delighted to report that this important wildlife refuge has permitted the survival and ultimate rediscovery of the spectacular Jackson's climbing salamander."