



The Klingon newt is named after an alien species from the Star Trek series (right).

Spotting New Species

Scientists recently discovered dozens of new plants and animals in Southeast Asia.

Deep in the tropical forests of Southeast Asia, there may be thousands of species waiting to be discovered. Each year, researchers from around the world travel to the Greater Mekong region hoping to find an unknown type of animal or plant. According to a recent report from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), 2015 was an especially successful year. Explorers discovered 163 new species in the region.

The Greater Mekong region includes all or parts of six countries (see map). The area is known for its rich **biodiversity**. Scientists have discovered more



than 2,000 new plant and animal species there since 1997.

One of these scientists is Olivier Pauwels from the Royal Belgium Institute of Natural Sciences. He and his team explored the jungles of Phuket (poo-ket) Island in Thailand in 2015. There, they discovered a new lizard, nicknamed the Phuket dragon.

“Seeing this little dragon at night in the middle of the jungle was just magic,” Pauwels says. We immediately realized we were dealing with a new species.” Some of the other species discovered in the region in 2015 are shown on this page.)

Despite the discoveries, it’s not all good news for the region. An increase in construction projects has destroyed the habitats of many species. Poachers also pose a threat to wildlife in the region.

Pauwels says it’s important to find and document new species because they can’t be protected if we don’t know they exist.

“There will be many more cool species for kids to discover, as long as we protect the forests and waters that they call home,” Pauwels says.

Word to Know

biodiversity (bye-oh-dih-VUHR-sih-tee) *noun*. the variety of plants and animals that live in a region



Phuket dragon



Woolly-headed bat



Rainbow-headed snake

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