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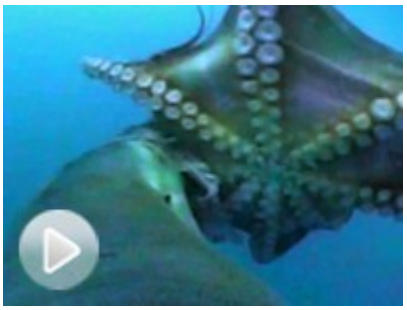
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New Tapir Discovered—One of Biggest Mammals Found This Century



Posted by Liz Langley on December 20, 2013

(17)

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Talk about a big discovery: A new tapir has been found in the Amazon—the largest land mammal discovered in recent history, a new study says.

The 4-foot-long (1.2-meter-long) forest dweller, dubbed *Tapirus kabomani,* has a few other firsts to its credit: It's the first new species of tapir to be named since 1865 and the first Perissodactyla, or "odd-toed" animal (a group that includes tapirs, rhinoceroses, and horses), to be described in over a century.



A camera-trap photo shows two of the newfound tapir species in the Amazon. Photograph by Samuel Nienow

Theodore Roosevelt collected the first *T. kabomani* specimen in 1912, describing it as "a bull, full-grown but very much smaller than the animal [Brazilian tapir] I had killed. The hunters said this was a distinct kind."

Indeed, though the newfound animal has a body mass of about 243 pounds (110 kilograms), it's still the smallest tapir: There are four other species, three in Central and South America and one in Asia—the latter can weigh up to 800 pounds (363 kilograms).

Even so, the specimen that Roosevelt sent back to the United States was long considered a variation of the Brazilian tapir, and was not identified by scientists as a new species until recently.

No News to Local Peoples

Of course, local people in its Amazonian habitat of Brazil and Colombia have long known about the species: *T. kabomani* comes from the word for tapir—*arabo kabomani*—in Paumari, a native language of southern Brazil.

Indigenous hunters contributed animals for study and helped identify the species from camera-trap photos, study leader author Mario Cozzuol wrote.

Watch a video of tapirs, also called "mountain cows."

"Local peoples have long recognized our new species, suggesting a key role for traditional knowledge in understanding the biodiversity of the region," Cozzuol said in the study, published recently in the *Journal of Mammalogy*.

The newbie differs from its relative the Brazilian tapir in several ways: It's smaller and has darker hair, a lower mane, and a broader forehead. Females also have a gray-white area around their head and neck, and they are larger than males.

The species lives in the Amazon rain forest of Brazil and Colombia and may also live in Guyana. It's unknown whether the newfound tapir is at risk of extinction, but an increasing human population in southwestern Amazonia is making it more urgent to find out, the study said.

The other four known species of tapir are listed as either vulnerable or endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species.

Follow Liz Langley on Facebook and Twitter.

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Comments

1. Craig C. Downer
   Minden, Nevada
   March 24, 2015, 3:02 pm

   Thanks for this important article, Liz. The tapirs of the world are very imperiled and need our help. They are very sensitive species and need the preservation of large tracts of tropical forest and in the case of the Mountain, or Andean Tapir, paramo habitat in the Andes. They are very important seed dispersers and a true keystone species. Tapirus kabomani is most likely in critical danger of extinction and conservation efforts should be taken immediately to protect its known habitat and search out where else it may occur and protect these areas too. They people should start learning to live in harmony with these tapir-containing ecosystems, not as parasites thereon, destroyers thereof. This is essential for all our survival, tapirs and humans alike. We people must stop being so selfish and greedy and learn to live respectfully with the other species such as this marvelous tapir, on our shared ancient home: Planet Earth.

2. Liz Langley 
   January 10, 2014, 1:37 pm

   @Tammy Law :Ps200 student 8 years old

   Hello Tammy! Thank you for writing (my apologies for taking awhile to respond) and I'd be glad to be your science friend here on National Geographic! As a scientist you'll probably find a lot of really cool stuff on NatGeo Kids, too – I'm not a scientist, I'm a writer, and I learn cool stuff from there all the time! 🙂 I hope you'll check it out and keep exploring! http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/kids/

3. KBP
   January 6, 2014, 3:10 pm

   In summary, Cozzuol et al.'s description of "T. kabomani" fails to provide compelling evidence for a new dwarf species of Amazonian tapir. Such as they are, their results suggest (but do not convincingly document) that there may be a population of phenotypically small tapirs in and around Rondônia, and that these may belong to a weakly supported and minimally divergent mtDNA haplogroup that also occurs (but perhaps with other phenotypic traits) in NE Amazonia. Before any major conservation efforts are made to protect "T. kabomani," we need better documentation that this taxon is anything more than nominal."
   Robert Voss (AMNH)

4. Tammy Law :Ps200 student 8 years old
   Rumson@Liz
   December 24, 2013, 6:26 pm

   Do you want to be my friend I mean ? You posted it

5. Tammy Law :Ps200 student 8 years old
   Rumson
   December 24, 2013, 6:24 pm

   Liz do want to be friends ?We could be explorers and scientists .I,m a scientist already .

6. Tammy Law :Ps200 student 8 years old
   Rumson
   December 24, 2013, 6:22 pm

   It looks like a cow with glowing eyes .

7. Tammy Law :Ps200 student 8 years old
   Rumson
   December 24, 2013, 6:21 pm

   @Alan -are you at ps 200 ?

8. Alan
   December 24, 2013, 8:10 am

Sweet sweet Tapir

9. Liz Langley 
   December 24, 2013, 12:18 am

   Thanks @Daniel – corrected!

10. Gowrisha CV
    Bangalore, India
    December 23, 2013, 9:12 pm

    Wow! So Good News
    Look like in avatar movie animals..

11. Fam Mamdouh
    Egypt
    December 23, 2013, 8:24 pm

    With the passage of days things will be discovered we did not think it exists …. This is wonderful

12. wise
    south africa
    December 23, 2013, 4:54 pm

    How come a huge animal like a tipir was not seen in the forest?

13. Sujan Rao
    Mangalore, India
    December 23, 2013, 3:49 pm

    Amazing news.

14. Daniel
    Canada
    December 23, 2013, 3:24 pm

    It should read ‘108 kilograms’, not ‘180’.

15. sFinka
    December 23, 2013, 3:24 pm

    There is still much to discover. Never stop exploring!

16. rocky chaudhry
    United States
    December 21, 2013, 12:26 pm

    so good to see them.

17. Mon
    December 20, 2013, 10:41 pm

    Just imagine all the knowledge lost from the languages that went extinct.

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National Geographic Voices

Researchers, conservationists, and others share stories, insights and ideas about Our Changing Planet, Wildlife & Wild Places, and The Human Journey. More than 50,000 comments have been added to 10,000 posts. Explore the list alongside to dive deeper into some of the most popular categories of the National Geographic Society's conversation platform Voices.

Opinions are those of the blogger and/or the blogger's organization, and not necessarily those of the National Geographic Society. Posters of blogs and comments are required to observe National Geographic's community rules and other terms of service.

Voices director: David Braun (dbraun@ngs.org)

Fighting Wildlife Crime: The Unsung Heroes



Journalist and National Geographic Fellow Bryan Christy uses investigative journalism to expose illegal wildlife trafficking around the globe. In this video he introduces a a series of interviews with the people fighting wildlife crime on the front lines.

Watch all the videos in the series>>

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Follow the links on the sidebar of any of the blog's pages for details and tips on how to apply for a Fellowship.

Photo of the 2016/2017 class of Fellows by Randall Scott.

Featured Research: Mushara Elephant Project



Caitlin O'Connell and her husband, Tim Rodwell, started the Mushara Elephant Project in Namibia 24 years ago to better understand elephant social structure, communication and health in order to apply this knowledge to improved care in captivity and ultimately to elephant conservation in the wild. O'Connell is on the faculty at Stanford University School of Medicine and CEO of the elephant-focused nonprofit, Utopia Scientific. A grantee of the National Geographic Society, she is also an award-winning author of six books about elephants. **Read Caitlin's dispatches from Mushara.**

Nat Geo Expedition: Rising Star



Two years after being discovered deep in a South African cave, the 1,500 fossils excavated during the Rising Star Expedition have been identified as belonging to a previously unknown early human relative that National Geographic Explorer-in-Residence Lee Berger and team have named *Homo naledi*.

With at least 15 individuals of all ages and both sexes represented, the find adds an unprecedented amount of information to our understanding of early human evolution in Africa.

In addition, the absence of any other animal remains or large debris in the fossil chamber strongly suggests that these non-human beings intentionally deposited their dead within this cave.

Join the discussion surrounding this remarkable discovery here and on Twitter:
#NalediFossils
@LeeRBerger
@NatGeoExplorers

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