

# INDIA ADDS 557 NEW SPECIES TO ITS FAUNA: ZOOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA

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A new species of Green Pit Viper discovered in Arunachal Pradesh. Photo: Special Arrangement

India has added 557 new species to its fauna, which includes 407 new species and 150 new records, reveals *Animal Discoveries 2020*, a document published recently by the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI). The number of faunal species in India has climbed to 1,02,718 species.

Among the new species, some interesting species discovered in 2020 are *Trimeresurus salazar*, a new species of green pit viper discovered from Arunachal Pradesh; *Lycodon deccanensis*, the Deccan wolf snake discovered from Karnataka; and *Sphaerotheca Bengaluru*, a new species of burrowing frog named after the city of Bengaluru. The list also includes *Xyrias anjaalai*, a new deep water species of snake eel from Kerala; *Glyptothorax giudikyensis*, a new species of catfish from Manipur; and *Clyster galateansis*, a new species of scarab beetles from the Great Nicobar Biosphere.

Among the new records, *Myotis cf. frater*, a bat species earlier known from China, Taiwan and Russia, has been reported for the first time from Uttarakhand in India; and *Zoothera citrina gibsonhilli*, an orange-headed thrush earlier known from southern Myanmar to south Thailand (central Malay peninsula), which was reported for the first time from India based on a collection made from the Narcondam island in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

Of these 557 species, invertebrates constitute the majority with 486 species, while 71 species belong to vertebrates. Among invertebrates, insects dominated, with 344 species, whereas pisces and reptiles dominated among vertebrates.

Among the States, the highest number of new species were discovered from Karnataka (66 species), followed by Kerala (51 species). Also in 2020, 46 new species were discovered from Rajasthan and 30 from West Bengal.

In terms of new records or species recorded in the country for the first time, Arunachal Pradesh had the highest (20 new records). In the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, 25 new species were discovered and 16 new records documented in 2020.

Of the 557 new species discovered, scientists and researchers from the ZSI contributed 121 new species and 86 new records in 2020.

Data analysis of the 2010-2020 decade reveals that a total of 4,112 species — 2,800 new species and 1,312 new records — were added to Indian fauna. It's also interesting that scientists of the ZSI contributed to 34% (948 species) of the newly described and 68% (898) of the newly recorded species in the last 10 years. The ZSI, which was set up by British zoologist Thomas Nelson Annandale, in 1916, has been publishing *Animal Discoveries* since 2007.

Commenting on the publication, Dhriti Banerjee, Director, Zoological Survey of India, said that the discovery and description of a species is a long-drawn process and can take years, from the collection of a specimen to identifying and matching the specimen with other records in repositories, and finally publishing the details in a journal.

Dr. Banerjee pointed out that 2020 has been tough year for scientists due to the COVID-19 pandemic as they could not survey protected areas, where a greater diversity of fauna exists. Dr. Banerjee said that with the encouragement of the Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change, the ZSI will in the years to come add new species and new records to India's faunal repository.

The ZSI publication shows that India is a mega biodiverse country, rich in biodiversity, with 23.39% of its geographical area under forest and tree cover. "India is positioned 8th in mega biodiversity countries in the world with 0.46 BioD index which is calculated by its percentage of species in each group relative to the total global number of species in each group," the document adds.

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The report said, the world will cross the 1.5° C warming mark in the 2030s, earlier than past predictions.

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