

## REASON TO CHEER: 596 NEW PLANT AND ANIMAL SPECIES DISCOVERED IN INDIA LAST YEAR

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Biodiversity, Ecology, and Wildlife Related Issues

Scientists and taxonomists have documented 596 new species of flora and fauna from India in the year 2018. The details of the discoveries were made public on Thursday by the Botanical Survey of India (BSI) and the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) in the publications *Plant Discoveries 2018* and *Animal Discoveries 2018*.

Of the 596 species, 372 come under fauna (311 invertebrates and 61 vertebrates). The newly identified 224 plant species include seed plants, pteridophytes, bryophytes, fungi and lichen.

About 31% of the plant species were discovered in the Himalayas. In the case of animals, the Western Ghats remained a biological hotspot from where about 50% of the species were found.

“The plants discovered this year includes close wild relatives of many potential horticulture, agriculture, medicinal and ornamental plants. The discoveries include plants belonging to groups Amomum (wild cardamom), Cycads, Rubus (raspberry), Syzygium (wild jamun), Terminalia, Balsams, Zingibers and also seven trees and 10 orchids,” said A.A. Mao, director of BSI.

He added that the BSI has placed emphasis on molecular DNA technology and phylogeny to confirm the discoveries.

Kailash Chandra, director of ZSI, said that modern taxonomic tools, like DNA analysis, helped in the discovery of frogs and reptiles

“Of the 61 species of vertebrates discovered this year, reptiles dominate (30 species),” Mr. Chandra said. 21 species of fishes, nine species of amphibians, and one mammalian sub-species were also found.

Kerala recorded the highest number of discoveries with 59 species. West Bengal, a state with both Himalayan and coastal ecosystems, recorded 38 and Tamil Nadu recorded 26.

With these new discoveries, the updated list of animal species in India has risen to 1,01,681 which is about 6.49% of all the species in the world, Mr. Chandra said.

S.S. Dash, head of the publication of BSI, said that the number of plant species in the country has been updated to 49,441 which is 11.5% of all flora in the world. “Over the past ten years, BSI has recorded discovery of 3,225 plant species,” he said.

Other than the discoveries, 139 species of animals were added to the fauna of India as new records. In terms of plants, 193 taxa of plants were added to flora of India as new records.

Last year, 539 new species of plants and animals were discovered, which included 300 species of animals and 239 species and sub-species of plants.

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