

Gleaming beetle one of 60 new species in Suriname

- 18:09 03 October 2013 by [Colin Barras](#)
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(Image: Trond Larsen/Conservation International)

It's easy to see how this beetle went unnoticed for so long. Its body is less than 3 millimetres long, making it one of the smallest beetles in South America. And it lives in one of the most untouched, unexplored places on Earth – south-east Suriname.

Little wonder, then, that this little creature is just one of 60 potentially new species announced this week following an expedition to the area last year. Discoveries included 11 fishes, six frogs, a snake, and several insects.

The beetle resembles one that has already been described – *Canthidium minimum* – but according to its discoverers it probably belongs to a new species, and maybe even a new genus.

Ecological role

Dung beetles like this one may be small, but they play a big role in keeping disease in check through their habit of burying animal dung.

Studying dung beetles can help establish the ecological health of a region, which could be important in Suriname. Already the water in the region contains slightly higher than acceptable levels of mercury, which was probably swept in on the wind from neighbouring countries.

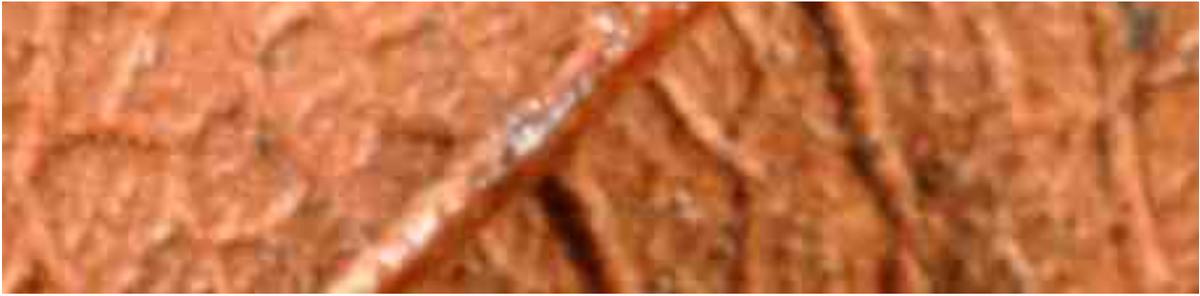
"We were startled to find that, even in the absence of any upstream mining," says Larsen. "This demonstrates that even the most isolated and pristine parts of the world are not entirely sheltered from human impacts – all systems are interconnected."

You ribbit here first

Other finds included the chocolate-coloured frog pictured below. "With many frog species rapidly disappearing around the globe, we were surprised and uplifted to discover so many frogs potentially new to science," says [Trond Larsen](#) of Conservation International, who took

part in the expedition.





(Image: Stuart V. Nielsen/Conservation International)

Larsen also has particular affection for the tiny golden tetra fish with red eyes that will look familiar to any aquarium owner who hosts a [head-and-tail light tetra](#).





(Image: Trond Larsen/Conservation International)