

Creatures thought to be extinct found alive in Honduras' 'Lost City'

Francesca Street, CNN • Updated 22nd June 2019



Red-eyed tree frog: A team of scientists visited an archeological site in Honduras' Mosquitia rainforest. While there, they spotted several rare animals. The red-eyed tree frog was one of 22 amphibian species documented.

Courtesy Conservation International

(CNN) — Deep in the lush greenery of the Mosquitia rainforest in Honduras, bordered by steep ridges, lies an archeological site home to ancient ruins and an apparently thriving ecosystem.

There's long been a rumor of a pre-Columbian settlement in this region, sometimes known as the "Lost City of the Monkey God" or "La Ciudad Blanca."

Aviator Charles Lindbergh said he saw it from the sky when he was flying over the region in the 1920s -- and many explorers have tried and failed to track down the legendary spot in Central America.

In 2015, [an archaeological site was discovered in the area](#) and is believed by some to be the settlement that inspired the legend.

Now a team of scientists, led by Conservation International's Rapid Assessment Program (RAP) in coordination with the Government of Honduras, have discovered this site is home to rare species.

Creatures uncovered include a tiger beetle, previously only ever recorded in Nicaragua and believed to be extinct.

The government of Honduras wanted to know what wildlife was living in this undisturbed region and commissioned this extensive survey of the area's biodiversity, with incredible results.

Overall, the team recorded 246 species of butterflies and moths, 30 bats, 57 amphibians and reptiles, alongside many plants, fishes, mammals and insects.

Many of these are rare and endangered.

Beautiful spot



The team had to be helicoptered into this remote rainforest area.
Courtesy Conservation International

But first, the team had to get to this secluded spot.

"It's so exciting to get to visit places where literally there's so few ways to get there," Trond Larsen, director of Conservation International's rapid assessment program, tells [CNN Travel](#).

"There's no roads, there's no logistical infrastructure to access, so you have to helicopter in. And when you do that, you end up visiting places where wildlife tends to be much more abundant."



The venomous eyelash viper.
Courtesy Conservation International

Larsen says the animals and creatures that live in the area aren't used to human interaction, which allowed for some incredible moments of interaction and education.

"Large groups of monkeys, for example, hang out and try to figure out what you are and what's going on, there's an opportunity to see tremendous amounts of wildlife," he says.

The explorer also highlights the beauty and serenity of the area.

"There's big, old-growth trees that you often just don't see in places that are more impacted by people. So these massive trees that are hundreds or even thousands of years old, that are just overwhelming in size, it's amazing to see."



A species of worm salamander.
Courtesy Conservation International

The archaeological excavations in the region are still ongoing.

For Larsen, spotting rare and endangered creatures is just as exciting.

"The most exciting finds were probably the rediscoveries of these species that [were] thought to be extinct in Honduras for a long time," he says.

The explorer was most surprised to see the white-lipped peccaries -- a species distantly related to pigs.

"They need such huge areas and move across wide landscapes to survive that we did not expect to find them there, but it was a really good indicator of this intact ecosystem," he says.

Amazing photographs



The team took this amazing shot of a glass frog.
Courtesy Conservation International

While exploring the area -- sleeping in tents and hammocks deep in the verdant forest -- Larsen, who also took photographs on the expedition, enjoyed getting as close as possible to the local wildlife.

"I like to get right in there, get down in the dirt, get in the water, search everywhere for as much as we can find," he says.

One particular encounter was unexpected, but memorable.

"I was on a night walk by myself in a very small tight narrow ravine and turned around and my head lamp illuminated these big glowing eyes -- and I didn't know what it was at first. And they came very close to me and I realized it was a big puma."



A morpho helenor butterfly in the rainforest.
Courtesy Conservation International

Larsen took a range of photographs -- from micro images capturing the animals in all their detail, to wide-lens images that evoke the landscape and the creatures' home.

"It's a balance, because I'm a scientist, I'm also collecting data and information on these trips, as one of the biologists participating, but I also carry my camera equipment with me everywhere, and try to photo-document a lot of what we're seeing," he says.



The team recorded sightings of the pale-faced bat, last documented in Honduras over 70 years ago.
Courtesy Conservation International

Larsen hopes viewers of the photographs will be left inspired to reflect on the magnificence of our world's wildlife.

"But being able to see up close what you can find in some of these remote rugged parts of the world, I think really can affect people deeply, especially young people and people who haven't had a chance to explore so much around the world," he says.

"But also, the fact that this is in conjunction with these amazing archaeological discoveries, I think it's extra-exciting. This makes this place truly special."













