

## **Spotting New Species**

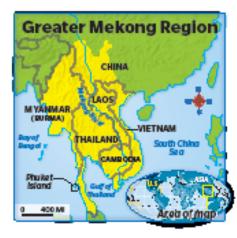
Scientists recently discovered dozens of new plants and animals in Southeast Asia.

eep in the tropical forests of Southeast Asia, there may be thousands of species waiting to be discovered Each year, researchers from around the world travel to the Greater Mekong region hoping to find an unknown type of animal or plant. According to a recent report from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), 2015 was an especially successful year. Explorers discovered 163 new species in the region.

The Greater Mekong region includes all or parts of six countries (*see map*). The area is known for its rich **biodiversity**. Scientists have discovered more

## Word to Know

**biodiversity** (bye-oh-dih-VUHRsih-tee) *noun*. the variety of plants and animals that live in a region



species there since 1997.

One of these scientists is Olivier Pauwels from the Royal Belgium Institute of Natural Sciences. He and his team explored the jungles of Phuket (poo-ket) Island in Thailand in 2015. There, they discovered a new lizard, nicknamed the Phuket dragon. "Seeing this little dragon at ight in the middle of the jungle ras just magic," Pauwels says. We immediately realized we rere dealing with a new species." Some of the other species iscovered in the region in 2015 re shown on this page.)

Despite the discoveries, it's not ll good news for the region. An ncrease in construction projects as destroyed the habitats of nany species. Poachers also pose ... threat to wildlife in the region.

Pauwels says it's important to find and document new species because they can't be protected if we don't know they exist.

"There will be many more cool species for kids to discover, as long as we protect the forests and waters that they call home," Pauwels says.

Rainbow-headed snake





