



สำนักงานที่ปรึกษาวิทยาศาสตร์และเทคโนโลยี
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A biologist from Brussels discovers a new species of lizard in the middle of Phuket



Brussels' biologist Olivier Pauwels, 43 years old, doesn't stop discovering new reptile species. He already described about seventy of them. Four years ago we interviewed him about a new species he had just discovered and described with his Thai friends. It was a viper found in the middle of the island of Phuket. It was a proof that there are not only tourists there! They then gave to this new reptile the name "Phuket Bamboo Pit Viper" as he had explained us.

This time, it is a small lizard with a dragon look that he discovered with a team including Thai and American researchers! "It has long horns on the head and a row of sharp spines along its back", Olivier Pauwels wrote in the scientific journal "Zootaxa". The scientist, who works as research associate for the Royal Belgian Institute for Natural Sciences, formally named the new reptile *Acanthosaura phuketensis*. "It literally means spiny lizard from Phuket; it is an extraordinary discovery", adds Olivier Pauwels, who made of his passion his job. Since he was three years old this man who grew up in Grand-Bigard was collecting newts, lizards and frogs! "Although Phuket is one of the most touristic places in the World, this is the third such major discovery our team made on this island, after a new gecko species and the now famous viper. They are endemic, which means they are found nowhere else on our Planet".

In spite of its scary look, says the biologist, this new lizard, which is about 35 cm long, is harmless. "It feeds mostly on insects. It is very discreet, and lives on trees in dense forest. It rarely comes down to the forest floor".

Tourism keeps growing in Phuket. This worries Olivier Pauwels. "Human infrastructures still expand, threatening the last remaining tropical forest patches on the island. This new discovery stresses how important it is to save the remaining jungle on the island. If these forests disappear, many unique creatures which live only there will also disappear".

Olivier's team has also discovered the only snake species that is endemic to Hong Kong Island.

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