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“Too cold for you maybe, but I love it” says a newly described frog from Mount Ky Quan San, northwestern Vietnam

Up high on a cold mountain in the northern reaches of Vietnam, a tiny frog has been deemed a new species thanks to the hard work of amphibian conservationists. While on the hunt for new populations of one threatened frog species, the research team discovered another one, possibly just in the nick of time.

The newly described species, the Ky Quan San Horned Frog (*Megophrys frigida*), was named after the mountain it was found on Mount Ky Quan San and looks very similar to another frog, the Fansipan Horned Frog (*M. fansipanensis*), but was confirmed to be a separate species after thorough analysis. This discovery is another addition to the fast-growing list of amphibians in the Hoang Lien Range.

The Hoang Lien Range is a significant biodiversity hotspot in Vietnam and Indochina generally, known for its endemism and richness of species, particularly amphibians. An extraordinary 86 out of Vietnam's nearly 270 reported amphibian species reside in this mountain range. Notably, it is the only known home of Vietnam's two Critically Endangered amphibians: Botsford's Leaf-litter Frog (*Leptobranchella botsfordi*) and Sterling's Toothed-toad (*Oreolalax sterlingae*).

Recent efforts have been hugely successful for researching and categorising the full extent of amphibian diversity here, as well as strengthening their conservation. Other new species include the Hoang Lien Horned Frog, *Megophrys hoanglienensis* and the aforementioned Fansipan Horned Frog.

The current study began in 2017, with an expedition jointly conducted by a team of international and domestic researchers on Mount Ky Quan San, the fourth highest mountain in Vietnam, in order to seek for additional distribution range of the Critically Endangered Botsford's Leaf-litter Frog. Although no individuals of the target species were detected, a population of horned frogs (*Megophrys* sp.) was found near the top of this mountain, at 2800 m a.s.l. The population was identified as its lookalike, the Fansipan Horned Frog, at that time, however after several months of molecular analysis, a team at the Australian Museum was able to confirm that it was an undescribed species. A combination of morphological, acoustic, and molecular evidence distinguished this population from 110 congener species of horned frogs of the genus *Megophrys*. The species name “frigida” takes the latin for “cold” (“frigida”), referring to the extremely cold weather at the new species' type locality. This mountain is occasionally covered with snow in the winter.



A male of the new species, *Megophrys frigida*.
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This new species inhabits an area near the top of Mount Ky Quan San, where forest has almost disappeared and been replaced by shrubs. There is a local farm/camp base raising goats and cows next to the area, which is considered to pose great threats to the habitat of frogs due to vegetation overgrazing.

The work has resulted from the international collaboration between Australian Museum, Zoological Society of London, Hoang Lien National Park and Asian Turtle Program (ATP) of Indo-Myanmar Conservation (IMC).

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On the way to the top of Mount Ky Quan San, one of the most mysterious sections during field survey due to the fog. © Nguyen Thanh Luan – ATP/IMC



The research team takes a break high up on Mount Ky Quan San. © Nguyen Thanh Luan – ATP/IMC