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A female of the new species, Mount Pu Ta Leng leaf-litter frog (*Leptobrachella graminicola*).
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Vietnam's frog hotspot reveals another new species of leaf-litter frog

Nearly one year after the publication of the description of tadpoles of the Botsford's Leaf-litter Frog (*Leptobrachella botsfordi*) in Vietnam, in August 2021, we welcomed the scientific recognition of another new member of the *Leptobrachella* genus, the Mount Pu Ta Leng Leaf-litter Frog (*Leptobrachella graminicola*). These tiny brown frogs, at only 2-3 cm in body length, have only been observed in a small stream at over 2,300m a.s.l. within the mountainous forest on Vietnam's Mount Pu Ta Leng, located within the Hoang Lien range.

The first description of the Mount Pu Ta Leng Leaf-litter Frog (*Leptobrachella graminicola*) was published in *Zootaxa* on the 6th August 2021, a culmination of work that started in 2019 with the discovery of the species in the wild. The team, made up of scientists from ATP/IMC as well

as researchers from the Zoological Society of London, UK, the Australian Museum and Hoang Lien National Park, Vietnam, has been focussing their efforts on the research and conservation of two Critically Endangered species, Botsford's Leaf-litter Frog (*Leptobrachella botsfordi*) and Sterling's Toothed Toad (*Oreolalax sterlingae*). However, the scope of their work extends much further and they have been able to discover more about the wider ecosystem here, including the description of now five new species in this mountain range in northern Vietnam since 2015.

Indeed, when a small expedition led by ATP/IMC's Nguyen Thanh Luan climbed Mount Pu Ta Leng, the second highest mountain in Vietnam, they were looking for *Leptobrachella botsfordi*. Reaching a height of 3,049 m at its peak, this mountain is not an easy place for scientists

to conduct surveys, due to its high elevation, steepness, low temperatures and high humidity all year round. While the team did not find the focal species, they did find a small population of a mysterious species of the same genus. Although its features seemed to resemble another related species, *L. bourreti*, careful analysis of its morphology and genetics confirmed that it was an undescribed species and it was given the name, the Mount Pu Ta Leng Leaf-litter Frog (*Leptobrachella graminicola*).

Both names given to the species denote an aspect of the habitat in which it was found; the common name, the Mount Pu Ta Leng Leaf-litter Frog, is clearly a reference to the mountain. The scientific name, *Leptobrachella graminicola*, refers to the grassy microhabitat each individual was observed in; *graminicola* stems from the Latin for 'grass-like', 'gramineus', and for 'inhabitant', 'incola'.

This discovery once again highlights the unique, but vulnerable biodiversity of Hoang Lien Range; these mountains are known to be home to more than 85 species of amphibians, many of which

are in danger of extinction. Despite several amphibian surveys conducted by our team in the range, data on many of these species, such as life histories, ecologies, elevational and distribution ranges, breeding behaviours and potential threats, are still unknown/poorly known to science. Therefore, further studies are essential in broadening our understanding of this species and the diverse but limited known, amphibian fauna in the region.

The new species is likely to be forest dependent and range restricted and thus, like many of its relatives, it is under threat of extinction by habitat loss and tourists' activities. A tourist trekking route and numerous camps have been constructed near its type locality despite being located within the protected Bat Xat Natural Reserve. We also hope that this finding will bring more attention from local authorities and emphasize the need for urgent action to protect valuable habitat and better manage tourism to preserve the biodiversity of the Hoang Lien Range.



A view of Mount Pu Ta Leng from 2300 m elevation.
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We would like to thank the the Zoological Society of London, the Australian Museum, and Hoang Lien National Park for collaborating with us on this research. We are also grateful to the board and staff of Hoang Lien National Park and Bat Xat Nature Reserve for facilitating the surveys and issuing permissions. Finally, we are thankful for Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, Ocean Park Conservation Foundation Hong Kong (under grant number AM01.1718) and an EDGE of Existence Fellowship by the Zoological Society of London and all of our numerous other donors and partners for supporting this project.



More information: Nguyen, L.T., Tapley, B., Nguyen, C.T., Luong, H.V. & Rowley, J.J.L. (2021) A new species of *Leptobrachella* (Anura, Megophryidae) from Mount Pu Ta Leng, northwest Vietnam. *Zootaxa* 5016, 301–332. <https://doi.org/10.11646/ZOOTAXA.5016.3.1>

Date: 12th August 2021

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A male of the new species, Mount Pu Ta Leng leaf-litter frog (*Leptobrachella graminicola*)

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All individuals of the new species were found on leaf of grass-like alongside stream.

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The habitat where the new species was found on Mount Pu Ta Leng. © Luan Thanh Nguyen – IMC.