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NatureWrap: New to the tree of life

Plus two clever birds and tips on hibernating.



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Credit: Richard Smith © 2020

Pictured above is *Hippocampus nalu*, Africa's first and only-known pygmy seahorse and one of 213 newly described plant and animal species added to the tree of life this year by the Californian Academy of Sciences.

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my, and the coral.

Some were right under our noses. The pipefish pictured below (*Stigmatophora harastii*) can be found off the coast of Australia's Botany Bay, a popular scuba diving site near Sydney. It doesn't live exactly where it would be expected to live, however, allowing it to avoid scientific scrutiny, as well as marine competition.

Others are long gone. The amber fossil at right allowed scientists to identify the amphibian *Yaksha peretti* and determine that it likely used its tongue as a slingshot to catch prey, much like modern-day chameleons. This, they say, extends the evolutionary origins of this adaptation to 100 million years ago.

More than two dozen Academy scientists and many more collaborators throughout the world described this year's newcomers, despite the unique challenges of COVID-19.

"Unfortunately, the pandemic is a symptom of our broken relationship with nature," says Chief of Science Shannon Bennett.

"These newly described species represent one aspect of a growing collective effort to mend that relationship.

"By improving our understanding of Earth's biodiversity and bringing us more in touch with the natural world, each new species serves as an important reminder—as does the pandemic—of our vital role in protecting our planet's ecosystems."



Credit: Adolf Peretti, GRS
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