MARK CARWARDINE WILD THOUGHTS

Name a new species while stocks last. That's the shocking message from a spate of recent discoveries. These days, it seems, every time scientists uncover a new plant or animal it heads straight for the endangered list.

New species are being found all the time – every expedition investigating a patch of land that hasn't been examined before adds a few more plants and animals to the world total. But it's beginning to feel like a race against the clock.

The reclusive kipunji, a new genus of monkey (not merely a new species) with a Mohican hairstyle, has just been found in two remote locations in Tanzania. But it is already under threat from logging and hunting, and in the same month that it was discovered, scientists warned that there were probably fewer than 1,000 left.

Meanwhile, a new species of fish – one of the smallest vertebrates in the world – has been found on the Indonesian island of Sumatra. Named *Paedocypris*, it is only 7.9mm in length and lives in tropical forest peat swamps. Unfortunately, long-term prospects for the fish are poor because of widespread forest destruction and drainage for oil palm plantations.

Scientists in Laos have discovered eight new frog species in the past two years. Among them is one in which the male is half the size of the female and another that has a row of spines running down its belly. And guess what? They are under threat because the forests are being cleared. We have named and described 1,562,663 of all the plants and animals on the planet. No one knows precisely, of course, but these probably account for between 5 and 10 per cent of the global total. We have evaluated only 2.57 per cent (40,168) and discovered that 40 per cent (16,118) are threatened with extinction. The kipunji, *Paedocypris* and the Laotian frogs, in other words, are just the tip of the iceberg.

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The situation seems bad when we hear about tiger numbers crashing in India or albatrosses in steep decline in the Southern Ocean. But it goes off the scale when we realise that most endangered species are likely to vanish before we had any idea that they existed in the first place.