



India's newest frog evolved 60 million years ago

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The starry dwarf frog, named after Wayanad's Kurichiya tribe, is found outside protected areas

- The discovery of the starry dwarf frog, a nocturnal amphibian that lives under leaf litter on a mountaintop in Kerala's Wayanad, has been published in PeerJ, an international multidisciplinary journal.
- It is just 2 cm long and sports pale blue spots and brilliant orange thighs.
- Recently, Dr. Vijayakumar from Centre for Ecological Sciences at Bengaluru's Indian Institute of Science and his co-workers, including from the George Washington University in the U.S., studied its physical, skeletal and genetic characteristics.
- They also compared the frog with specimens of similar species in museum collections across the world.
- While scans of its skeletons showed it to be completely different from any other similar-sized frog seen in Wayanad, some of its physical characteristics (such as its triangular finger- and toe tips) closely resembled frogs in South America and Africa.
- Genetic studies, however, revealed a different story: its closest relatives are the Nycibatrachinae group of frogs that dwell in the streams of Western Ghats, and the Lankanectinae frogs of Sri Lanka.
- The team named the new species the starry dwarf frog *Astrobatrachus kurichiyana* (genus *Astrobatrachus* after its starry spots and *kurichiyana* in honour of the Kurichiya tribal community who live in the area).
- It is not only a new species but different enough to be assigned to a new 'subfamily'.
- Genetic analysis reveal that the species is at least 60 million years old.

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