

Critically endangered frog discovered will add to knowledge about Belizean Rainforest...

One gap year company's aim to take their volunteers off the normal tourist trail has come up trumps in helping record the location of the critically endangered Morelet's Tree Frog.

The group who had joined Trekforce Worldwide for their gap year to Belize came across the frog while on the Chiquibul trek, a 5 day expedition into southern Belize. During the trek you are surrounded by howler monkey and numerous different types of bird but 'seeing an animal is a bit of a novelty, as most run off when they hear us approaching' said Andy Smith, one of the volunteers on the trek.

Emma Cockcroft who found the frog said 'It was seen on the toughest day of the trek and we were almost at the camp, I was near the back of the group and the bright blue colour caught my eye.'

On its discovery, the frog was initially believed it could be a new species and images were sent to experts. 'This is a critically endangered species with very limited locality records for Belize' informs Paul Walker from Wildtracks, a small, non-profit, conservation organisation located in Northern Belize.

Paul also points out, 'The Morelet's Tree Frog is a nocturnal species occurring in the Maya Mountains that is green at night. Colour change is not uncommon in many amphibians when they are hidden away at rest, but I'm surprised that the blue colouration is so marked: normally one expects "sleeping colours" to be more cryptic for camouflage.' The trekkers' information on where exactly the frog was found and at what time is vital to be able to observe this critically endangered species and ensure that it is not wiped out completely.

Trekforce continues to make sure they promote real travel with a purpose through their rainforest conservation projects in Belize, building research centres to attract scientific groups who will help maintain and protect the rainforest and clearing tourist trails for the national park to highlight the importance of the area to locals as well as providing an income through sustainable tourism.

They have also pledged to become carbon neutral through a partnership with World Land Trust. Anyone who signs up for an expedition with Trekforce in 2007 or 2008 can now travel with a conscience and know that they are already helping conserve the rainforest before they have even landed in Belize. For more information on getting involved in a rainforest conservation project go to www.trekforceworldwide.com or call 0845 241 3085.

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