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Reuters

A dragon-sized, fruit-eating lizard that lives in the trees on the northern Philippines island of Luzon has been confirmed as a new species, scientists reported on Tuesday.

By **Charles Q. Choi**

LIVE SCIENCE
updated 8:03 p.m. CT, Tues., April 6, 2010

A giant, spectacularly colored new species of [monitor lizard](#) has just been revealed to scientists in the Philippines.

The reptile, which is roughly 6 feet long (1.8 meters), is kin to Komodo dragons, the [world's largest lizards](#). Named [Varanus bitatawa](#), this newly discovered species, [decorated in stripes of gold flecks](#) and armed with huge, curved claws for climbing trees, is one of only three fruit-eating monitor species in the world.

New to science, not residents

As humans continue to explore the last uncharted regions of the planet, discoveries of previously unknown species of large vertebrates have become rare. It remains doubly surprising this reptile managed to escape the attention of the many biologists that work on the heavily populated island of Luzon.

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"I am most impressed that such a large, conspicuous, brightly colored species of **monitor lizard** escaped the notice of biologists for the past 150 years," said researcher Rafe Brown, a field herpetologist at the University of Kansas.

Still, remarkably few surveys have explored the reptile diversity of the island's northern forests. The reptile also seems highly secretive and dislikes traversing open areas.

"At the same time, we are humbled because the species is not really new — it is only new to us as Western scientists," Brown said. "In fact, resident indigenous communities — the Agta and Ilongot tribes — have known about it for many generations. If only scientists had listened to them earlier!"