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## A Remarkable Discovery in Vietnam

After spending most of a rainy afternoon scrambling across slippery slopes to reach a Vietnam's Chu Mom Ray National Park, bat biologist Vu Dinh Thong and colleague Pham Duc Tien happened upon the entrance to a small cave. They were in the midst of a bat-diversity survey but saw nothing to suggest bats were using the cave. The storm was worsening, however, so they decided to climb inside simply to escape the rain. That proved a fortunate choice.



Griffin's long-tongued bat. Photo by Vu Dinh Thong

They were surprised to spot several large bats within the cave, Thong said, so they set up a harp trap at the entrance and quickly captured two of the bats. At first sight, he said, they looked like great leaf-nosed bats, but “we were deeply impressed that they remained quite gentle while being captured and placed in separate cotton bags” actions that visibly anger great leaf-nosed bats. They also found that the echolocation calls of these bats were distinct from any leaf-nosed bat known in the region.

Thus began, in June 2008, a years-long investigation of the bats from that nondescript little cave. They eventually proved to be members of a fascinating, new-to-science bat species that shines a spotlight on the diversity of Vietnam's bats.

Vietnam ranks among nations with the greatest biodiversity, which clearly includes a rich variety of bat species. What had always been missing, however, were scientists trained to study bats. As the first Vietnamese biologist to specialize in bats, Thong's research was supported by grants from Bat Conservation International's Global Grassroots Conservation Fund, the Harrison Institute of the United Kingdom, the University of Tuebingen in Germany and others.

Much of his work focused on the insectivorous horseshoe and Old World leaf-nosed bats of Vietnam. Both families are notable for the distinctive nose leaf “a complex and often-crinkled fleshy growth at the end of the muzzle. The nose leaves apparently are used to focus the bats' echolocation calls.

From 2006 through 2011, Thong led bat surveys at various sites around the country. Those surveys took him to the little cave in Chu Mom Ray and the two captured bats. In August 2009, his team found several more of these bats about 600 miles (1,000 kilometers) north of Chu Mom Ray. Lengthy examination revealed that not only echolocation calls, but also several key features of skulls and teeth differed significantly from all known leaf-nosed (*Hipposideros*) species. Genetic analysis confirmed the uniqueness of these bats.

The new species was officially reported in the February 2012 issue of the *Journal of Mammalogy*. Since it was first recognised by its echolocation frequencies, Thong said, the new bat is named after the late Professor Donald Redfield Griffin of the United States, who first reported bat echolocation in 1940 and who, in fact, coined the term.

This new species is *Hipposideros griffini*. Griffin's leaf-nosed bat received an unusual amount of attention from international news media, perhaps because of its rather peculiar appearance.

*BCI Members can read the whole story of this new bat species in the Summer 2012 issue of BATS magazine. You can help support important research and conservation by contributing to the Global Grassroots Conservation Fund*

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