



Cypriot Mouse

Never Stop Looking

1 Many people would say that the Age of Discovery on Earth is long gone. They may be wrong. There are no new continents to find or any new oceans hiding out there, but that certainly doesn't mean we should stop exploring this world.

Unbelievable as it may sound, discoveries are still being made in the natural world. New

species of creatures are found quite regularly. Some are just tiny creatures like bugs while others are larger, like birds and mammals.

2 In October 2006, scientists announced a new species of mouse on the island of Cyprus, in the Mediterranean Sea. The Cypriot mouse, as it is now called, is the first new mammal species to be found in Europe in over a

hundred years.

This little, grey fur-ball has a bigger head than the rest of its cousins in Europe. In fact, it has bigger teeth, eyes and ears than the common European mouse. This little rodent's scientific name is *Mus cypriacus*.

3 This discovery came as a huge surprise to scientists. Most native mammals on the Mediterranean islands became extinct when domestic animals and rats were introduced. It was thought that every species of European mammal had been identified.

It would seem that the little Cypriot mouse is the only native Mediterranean mouse still alive today. Or is it? If we found this one, there might be others hiding somewhere. Maybe we should keep looking. Mice are only small; it would be easy to miss one.

4 Only a year or so before the discovery of the Cypriot mouse, scientists discovered not just one, but two new species of lemur on the island of Madagascar, in the Indian Ocean. As of this discovery, the total number of identified lemur species in the world sits at forty-nine.

These tiny, pointy-nosed characters are small primates. This means they are related to humans and apes. Lemurs have bushy tails and long arms and legs with strong toes and fingers. All lemurs are native to the island of Madagascar and several nearby islands to the north.

5 Both of the newly discovered lemurs, the Goodman's mouse lemur and the northern giant mouse lemur, are quite small. And like

most of the other forty-seven lemurs, they are under great threat from the actions of humans. Eighty per cent of their natural forest habit in Madagascar has been cleared for crop growing. The clearing of land around the world is a growing problem for many species.

Goodman's
Mouse Lemur

6 In 2004 an interesting-looking bird was discovered in a remote area of Colombia, in Central America. This colourful little chirper, not much bigger than a tennis ball, has spiky orange or red feathers on its head. This makes it look like a miniature punk rocker. Its chest feathers are bright yellow while its back is completely black. It wasn't until 2005, through the use of blood samples, that it was proved to be a new species.

