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New flora and fauna species found

Discoveries made in undisturbed portion of limestone forest on Gunung Kanthan

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PETALING JAYA: Botanists have discovered two new plant species and a new species of gecko within an undisturbed portion of limestone forest on Gunung Kanthan that many fear will be quarried in the near future.

Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) plant taxonomist Dr Ruth Kiew said the new discoveries were further proof that the area, known as Zone C of Gunung Kanthan, near Ipoh, has critical conservation value.

Kiew said they had found a diminutive herb with purple flowers (*Gymnostachyum nov*) from the Acanthaceae family, and a tree (*Vatica nov*) from the Dipterocarpaceae family.

"In addition to these two new species, Zone C is also home to nine species on Malaysia's Red List of Endangered Plants. They are in danger of extinction," she told *The Star*.

Kiew said the find was made during one of several plant surveys last year in Zones C and D at the southern portion of Gunung Kanthan to compile a complete record of all plant species there.

Botanists also suspect that the critically endangered *Paraboea vulpina* of the African Violet family had gone extinct on Gunung Kanthan due to quarrying in the northern portion of the mountain.

The plant was recorded there by the Malaysian Nature Society in its 1991 study, and with its extinction at Kanthan, only two other population sites on other limestone hills remain.

American herpetologist Dr Lee Grismer, who had led a group of local and foreign biologists in surveys of the area last July, has also discovered a new species of gecko there.

Named the Gua Kanthan bent-toed gecko (*Cyrtodactylus guakanthanensis*), the 7cm-long lizard bears five dark bands on its body and seeks refuge in cracks on the limestone walls.

Grismer said the species appeared to be restricted to the hill, as it was not seen in nearby limestone hills. This makes it the second endemic fauna species in the area, besides the trapdoor spider *Liphistius kanthan*.



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New species:
 (From left) The Gua Kanthan bent-toed gecko and the 'Vatica nov' tree. The gecko was discovered during a survey of the area by Grismer (inset).



Rare blooms: The attractive purple flowers of the diminutive herb, 'Gymnostachyum nov', which was discovered by FRIM in a recent plant survey of Zones C and D of Gunung Kanthan in Ipoh.