

A new species of spider that looks like a humbug and is just as sweet

A new jumping spider that looks like a humbug, a new peacock spider with eyes on its back and a new wolf spider wearing a fur stole—these are just some of the amazing new species discovered as part of the latest Bush Blitz expedition held in Little Desert National Park and the Wimmera region of Victoria last week.

The new spiders are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to species discovery during the two week long Bush Blitz. New species of leaf bugs, lichens and moths have also been discovered by a 30 strong team of researchers from Museums Victoria, Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, Queensland Museum and the University of New South Wales.

The expedition is part of Australia's largest species discovery program, Bush Blitz, a partnership between the Australian Government, BHP, Earthwatch Australia and Parks Australia.

Jo Harding Bush Blitz Manager said discovering new spiders on a Bush Blitz is becoming a trend.

"We have discovered more than 500 new species of spider in the past 10 years, and over 1,700 new species overall. But finding new jumping spiders is unusual because they're so tiny. They're also incredibly cute, even an arachnophobe like me can't help but fall in love with them."

Dr Barbara Baehr, member of the spider team, from Queensland Museum said discovering this new species of furry wolf spider is very exciting.

"Most people see wolf spiders in their backyards, but don't realise there are many different species. This new species is part of a whole new genus that's only now just being discovered by science."

Joseph Schubert from Museums Victoria is the other half of the spider team.

"I didn't think we would find such a massive diversity of jumping spiders in Little Desert National Park. I walked in expecting to find one or two peacock spider species and we ended up finding seven." he said. "Two of them we thought only existed in Western Australia and New South Wales, while another one we found may be an entirely new species."

The research team was assisted by five teachers through Bush Blitz TeachLive, where they work as field assistants while teaching their students remotely through blogs and video conference.

Lynne Nadebaum from Good Shepherd College in Hamilton, Victoria said that performing science in the real world was important for teachers everywhere.

"We want our students to have authentic tasks and for us to be performing meaningful science with real scientists – experts in their field – this gives teachers a depth of understanding that would be impossible any other way. I am so excited to go back to school and see what we can discover in our own 'Bush Blitz' on the school farm."

The highly successful Little Desert expedition is also the 40th Bush Blitz trip since the program began in 2009. Each expedition adds importantly to our knowledge and understanding of Australia's unique biodiversity.

Images available at <http://bushblitz.org.au/media-centre/>

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