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New species of bat, frogs found in Congo

NEW YORK (Reuters) -- Six new species, including a bat and two frogs, have been discovered in Democratic Republic of the Congo in an eastern area off limits to scientists for decades because of violence, a wildlife group said Tuesday.

The New York-based Wildlife Conservation Society said researchers conducted a survey of a remote forested region just west of Lake Tanganyika between January and March.

"If we can find six new species in such a short period it makes you wonder what else is out there," said researcher Andrew Plumptre.

The new species discovered were a bat, a rodent, two shrews and two frogs.

"In spite of the conflict and related degradation in the area, the survey team found that some 1,000 square kilometers have remained intact, from the shores of Lake Tanganyika up to elevations of 2,725 meters above sea level," a statement said.

It said the area had been off limits to scientists since 1960 because of instability. The team also included researchers from the Field Museum in Chicago, the National Center of Research and Science in Lwiro and the World Wildlife Fund.

The statement said the forest was extremely rich in biodiversity, containing a large number of chimpanzees, buffalo, elephants, leopards and monkeys.

Around 10 percent of the plant samples collected have yet to be identified.

"Given the findings with the vertebrates, it is likely that some of the plants will represent new species as well," said Ben Kirunda of the group's botanical team.

Reuters, 9 Aug.

Vampire tale takes bite out of 'Potter' Eclipse of the Harry: Stephenie Meyer's teen vampire tale bumped J.K. Rowling's teen wizard story from the No. 1 spot.

After three weeks, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, the final book in J.K. Rowling's series, has been knocked off its perch atop USA TODAY's Best-Selling Books list by another fantasy aimed at teens.

Eclipse, the third book in Stephenie Meyer's series about a girl whose boyfriend is a vampire, enters the list today at No. 1, edging out Hallows (No. 2).

Little, Brown reports Eclipse sold nearly 250,000 copies its first week. The publisher is printing another 100,000 copies after a 1-million-copy first printing. Hallows sold a record 11.5 million copies in the 10 days after its July 21 release, according to Scholastic, which declined to release sales figures for the past week.

Meyer's back story nearly rivals that of Rowling, who was a single mother on welfare in 1995 when she finished her first Potter book after conjuring the boy wizard on a train ride.

Four years ago, Meyer, 33, was a stay-at-home mom in Glendale, Ariz., with no plans to write a book. But after a vivid dream about a girl talking to a handsome young vampire, "I starting writing it down so I wouldn't forget it."

Those 10 pages became Chapter 13 in her first novel, *Twilight*, published in 2005.

When she began, Meyer says, "I wasn't a writer; I was a reader, but I was curious to see what happened next." She kept writing, telling only her sister, who urged her to try to sell it.

In one of those rare success stories that inspire unpublished writers, Meyer found an agent via the Web and got a contract.

Eclipse is Meyer's first book to make its debut at No. 1. Before its release, she had been no higher than No. 39. It's also boosting her earlier books. *Twilight*, in paperback, is No. 10; *New Moon* (2006) is No. 31.

Many of her readers are girls, but Meyer is thrilled when boys tell her, "My girlfriend made me read this, but I really like it."

The books mix fantasy with romance, without sex, drugs or foul language. Meyer's "pet peeve about the (young adult) genre is that there seems to be an empty spot for novels where kids aren't doing drugs and having sex."

Meyer, a Mormon who studied literature at Brigham Young University, says her novels "aren't overly religious, but my characters, even the vampires, think about religion."

By Bob Minzesheimer
Usa Today, 16 Aug

Book Folks: Vampire tale pulls in millions

In July, Fox 2000 and director Ridley Scott's Scott Free Productions won a bidding war among four studios for an unfinished manuscript of a vampire novel, "less than half of the book," said *The New York Times*, the first volume of a projected trilogy. The price? \$1.75 million. The author of "The Passage"? Jordan Ainsley. The reason you've never heard of Jordan Ainsley is that he doesn't exist. The real author is Justin Cronin, who -- to bring this story down to a strictly local level -- taught in the English department at the University of Memphis in 1991 and reviewed two books for *The Commercial Appeal's* book page.

Cronin has published two well-received novels -- "Mary and O'Neil" (2001), which won the PEN/Hemingway Award, and "The Summer Guest" (2004) -- and has a modest reputation as an author of serious family-drama fiction. His agent, the literary powerhouse Ellen Levine of Trident Media Group -- who will now be getting 10,000

unsolicited manuscripts of vampire novels, including mine -- said that the idea of putting "The Passage" out under a pseudonym wasn't to hide anything but not to distract the bidders because of Cronin's previous, um, noncommercial and apparently unfilmable work.

American publishing rights to the proposed trilogy sold to Ballantine Books for about \$3 million. The premise of the books is that the vampires are born not from the traditional bites of other vampires but from medical experiments that go haywire. Hmmm, that scheme brings to mind Richard Matheson's classic, terrifying short novel from 1954, "I Am Legend," in which vampirism is not spread by vampire bites but is a plague caused by a bacterium, perhaps the result of germ warfare.

Fredric Koeppl
www.commercialappeal.com, 19 Aug
