

SCOOP!

SHOCKING FLASHER OF THE AMAZON

A NOCTURNAL ENCOUNTER
IN THE LOWLAND RAINFOREST
OF ECUADOR WITH
A GIANT LEAF-MIMIC KATYDID
LEAVES US DUMBFUNDED -
SCROLL ON AND DISCOVER WHY



■ *Pterachroza ocellata* in its restive state, showing how it has successfully evolved to perfectly mimic a large leaf. This is how it can be observed in the field - with some luck and good eyesight.



The sudden flashing of the inner wings and wing covers reveals a confusing pattern of bright colors, which never fail to surprise the observer.

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As we stumble on the muddy, slippery, leaf-littered yellow soil of the Ecuadorian Amazon rainforest at night, I seem to perceive a slight, hesitant movement among the thickly leaved branches along the trail - just a hint, with the corner of my eye. A tree frog, possibly, or maybe, with some luck, even a tree viper? The light beam of my headlamp swings around in the pitch dark as the ever-so-slight trembling of a large green-brown leaf is repeated. But wait - that is no leaf, that is a huge, absolutely spectacular leaf-mimic katydid! My jubilant cry alerts our companions as we illuminate the large insect, openly poised on a branch. Its body camouflage is absolutely stunning - even the delicate veining of a real large leaf is perfectly

reproduced, down to the minutest details - tiny spots of mold here, small dried-up areas there. We gaze in stupefied admiration at this miniature masterpiece of deceit, but there's more to come - as I put my hand forward to gently coax it in a better position for a photo, the leaf-mimic katydid suddenly shudders, simultaneously raising and flashing open its large wings and wing covers, revealing a blinding, confusing array of bright colors and patterns, dominated by two enormous ocelli, at the same time starting to bounce around in short, grotesque hops as some displaying or wounded bird! Admittedly startled by this unexpected and rather unnerving behavior, we step back with a gasp - proof, if needed at all,

of the extraordinary success of its defensive ruse. It's like facing a monstrously beautiful, unknown creature made of living, raw flesh - or a living, hopping and very big flower, who knows? So here we introduce to you this wonderful creature - *Pterachroza ocellata* is its scientific name - which first successfully pretends to be a leaf to disappear in the rainforest vegetation, and then puts on a sudden and equally successful show to shock and awe its would-be predators. Fascinating indeed! We would find a few more specimens of this same species, during other nightly explorations, often showing different colors and patterns - but always eliciting in us the same childish enthusiasm and sense of wonder. Isn't our *Pterachroza* an incredible creature?



Another image of the leaf-mimic katydid *Pterachroza ocellata* in its normal state. Far right, the flashing sequence of another individual, possibly belonging to a different *Pterachroza* species - notice different coloration and patterns.



Two images of the same *Pterachroza ocellata* individual - frontally on the left, from the back on the right - show in detail its "flashing" defensive behavior, a strategy which greatly increases its perceived size and confuses would-be predators about its real identity and possible defensive means.

