



*The Rhino-horned lizard **Ceratophora stoddartii** is an endemic species with a very restricted distribution range from the cloud forest of Horton Plains National Park, in the Central Highlands of Sri Lanka.*

SRI LANKAN ENDEMIC **THE RHINO LIZARD**

MEET A STUPENDOUSLY CRYPTIC, LARGE-SCALED, SLOW-MOVING REPTILE ADORNED WITH A MOVEABLE HORN AT THE TIP OF ITS NOSE



■ *Ceratophora stoddartii* is usually found among thick mosses, epiphytes and leaf litter.

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The montane forests shrouding the Central Highlands region of Sri Lanka host a fascinating, bewildering array of exceptionally beautiful *Agamidae* lizard species, often carrying extravagantly-shaped nasal appendages. Possibly the most striking of them all is the stunningly beautiful Rhino-horned lizard *Ceratophora stoddartii*, which with a degree of luck and some patient searching can be observed in several localities ranging from Nuwara Eliya to Hakgala, Pattipola, Ohiya, Horton Plains, Hewaheta, Dimbula, Agarapathana and Adam's

Peak. We had the opportunity of finding several different individuals belonging to this truly beautiful species while exploring the cloud forest of Horton Plains National Park together with our friends Mevan Piyasena and Sandaruwan Abayaratne. This is a slow moving reptile, often found among the thick mosses on the ground or on the lowest branches of the stunted trees and thick bushes growing in this cold, misty environment. Striking points of interest include the large, somewhat carelessly-looking arranged scutes, the elegant mottled coloration ranging

from moss green to a warm brown and of course the curious nasal appendage - a pointed "rhino horn" made of overlapping scales and - surprisingly - hinged at the base, which can be pointed at will at different angles; this last tract possibly pointing at its use by *Ceratophora stoddartii* as a means of communicating for territorial, courting or breeding purposes with other members of the species. Beautiful, gentle and easily caught, the Rhino lizard is sadly another of several unique Sri Lankan endemics endangered by the illegal traffic for the international reptile pet trade. ●



The beautifully mottled green or brown livery of the Rhino lizard helps it to blend well with its forest environment.





The nose horn of the ■ Rhino lizard is somewhat hinged at its base by a ligament, and can be moved at will by the animal - probably for intraspecific communication purposes.





Antonella observes an adult specimen of *Ceratophora stoddartii* basking along a road in the Horton Plains. This is a very gentle, slow-moving species.





The head of *Ceratophora stoddartii* is oval, and longer than wide. The rostral appendage is long, horn-like, about two thirds the length of the snout in males, but it is greatly reduced or even absent in females.



■ This unique species is sadly one of the countless endemic species of Sri Lanka being regularly and illegally captured by wildlife traffickers for the lucrative international reptile pet trade.