1st record of 'very rare' Mahabharat Torrent frog found in India

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Dehradun: Scientists have claimed to have found "the very first record" of the Mahabharat Torrent frog (Amolops mahabharatensis) in India. The species is an extremely rare one, endemic to the Himalayas and spotted previously only in Nepal. The discovery was made in a hill stream in Nainital by researchers from Doon-based Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Laboratory of Animal Behaviour and Conservation (LABC), Amphibian Specialist Group, IUCN and Biodiversity Research and Conservation Foundation (BRCF), during a three-year project study on amphibians in the Himalayan region. The lead researcher from BRCF, Vishal Kumar Prasad, said, "This is a significant find as it's an extremely rare species of frog, which is found only in freshwater streams of high-altitude mountains. It's also an environmental indicator. Its presence means that the water quality and ecosystem in the area is still good." The frog's call pattern includes several types of calls, which sound like a whistling bird.

UNIQUE TRAITS

- **Mahabharat Torrent frog** is endemic to the Himalayas
- It was spotted previously only in Nepal
- It is found only in freshwater streams of high-altitude mountains
- It's an environmental indicator, its presence means the ecosystem is healthy
- The frog's calls sound like a whistling bird

The identity of the frog was confirmed by using "a multi-integrated taxonomic approach of DNA barcoding, bioacoustics, biogeography and morphology techniques", scientists said. The Himalayas is a biodiversity hotspot but rising anthropogenic pressure (human interference) is degrading the habitats of amphibians, say scientists. The threat is mainly due to agrochemical pollution, check dams, solid waste dumped into streams, unplanned urbanisation and mass tourism and climate change. Like all amphibians occurring in the Himalayan region, the Mahabharat Torrent frog is also highly vulnerable to climate change. These amphibians have relatively low dispersal capability, endemism and adaptation to high elevations.