PRESS RELEASE



Primates in peril: Our closest living relatives are facing an extinction crisis

Researchers find that 60% of the primate species in four primate-rich countries are threatened with extinction.

Non-human primates (lemurs, lorises, galagos, tarsiers, monkeys, and apes) are our closest biological relatives and offer unique insights into human evolution, biology, ecology, behavior, and the threat of emerging diseases. They are an essential component of tropical biodiversity, contributing to forest regeneration and ecosystem health, and play important roles in the livelihoods, cultures and religions of many societies. Some 60% of these primates are threatened with extinction, and therefore, we need to take immediate action.

An article, coauthored by 28 internationally recognized experts on primate conservation from the U.S., Europe, Asia, Latin America, and Africa, and recently published in *PeerJ – the Journal for Life and Environmental Sciences*, calls for urgent action to protect the world's rapidly vanishing primate populations. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN 2017) reports that while wild primates occur in 90 countries, just four—Brazil (102 primate species), Madagascar (100 species), Indonesia (48 species), and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (36 species) — harbor 65% (n = 286 species) of all primate species. Fully 60% of these species are threatened with extinction, including chimpanzees, orangutans, and Western lowland gorillas. The two countries most at risk are Indonesia, with 83% of species threatened and 94% of populations declining, and Madagascar, with 93% of species threatened and 97% of populations declining.

In calling for a global imperative to prevent this looming mass extinction event, the authors examined the anthropogenic and societal pressures, such as habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation, political instability, corruption, human population expansion, food insecurity, and unsustainable commodity international trade driven by demands of consumer nations. For example, these four primate-rich countries sell at least 50% of all exports of raw materials (e.g., soya and cattle, oil palm, rubber, hardwoods, fossil fuel, minerals and gems) to China, the US, Canada, India, and several European countries.

Additional pressures are bush-meat hunting (a major threat to primates in the DRC) and illegal trade of primates for pets, medicinal or mystical purposes. Environmental degradation in each country is affecting the unprecedented loss of native animal and plant communities and the increased threat of human and domestic-animal borne infectious diseases leading to primate population declines, and extirpation. These diseases also are a major threat to local and global human health.

Using information from the World Bank and United Nations databases, these researchers modeled spatial conflict between current primate distributions and projected agricultural

expansion in these four primate-richest countries under a worst-case-scenario. The results indicated an expected primate range contraction of 78% for Brazil, 72% for Indonesia 62% for Madagascar and 32% for DRC by the end of the century.

Thus, unless these countries, international organizations, consumer nations, and global citizens take immediate action to protect primate populations and their habitats by expanding protected areas, creating forested corridors for migration between otherwise isolated populations, incentivizing the restoration of native forest communities, increasing food security and opportunities that are beneficial to people's livelihoods, prioritizing sustainability and clean energy, and requiring consumer nations and international corporations to pay into a green sustainability/conservation fund to offset over consumption and environmental damage, many iconic species will be lost.

The researchers caution that primates are like the canary in the coal mine. If we continue to pollute, degrade, and overexploit environments, then in the coming decades these ecosystems will no longer be suitable for humans.

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Images:



Image credit: Howler monkey in Brazil, photograph by Rhett A Butler (Mongabay) Designed by: Significant Science Communication (Elzemiek Zinkstok)

PRIMATES IN PERIL

The significance of Brazil, Madagascar, Indonesia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo for global primate conservation



Image credit: Ring-tailed lemur, photograph by Rhett A Butler (Mongabay) Designed by: Significant Science Communication (Elzemiek Zinkstok)



Caption: Indonesia, Sunda slow loris (Nycticebus coucang), sold in Jakarta (Photo credit: A. Walmsley and Little Fireface Project)



Caption: Indonesia, Javan slow loris (Nycticebus javanicus), Critically Endangered (Photo Credit: Andrew Walmsley/Little Fireface Project)



Caption: Brazil, pygmy marmoset (Cebuella pygmaea), Vulnerable, (Photo credit: Pablo Yépez)



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