

Scientist investigates human links to endangered Chinese 'snub-nosed' monkeys

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(Phys.org)—A Swiss primatologist who arrived at The University of Western Australia in April to work in the School of Anatomy, Physiology and Human Biology probably won't mind too much if his students start 'monkeying around' occasionally in class.

Assistant Professor Cyril Grueter is used to it, having he spent almost two years in Yunnan - a remote mountainous region of China - studying a group of 400 black and white snub-nosed monkeys.

The monkeys - never seen outside China - live in similar social groups to humans and Assistant Professor Grueter observed them in their wild state to investigate the evolutionary pathways that lead to our multilevel

societies. His study was recently published in the *International Journal of Primatology*.

Assistant Professor Grueter said while [chimpanzees](#) were normally studied because they were genetically closest to humans, he chose snub-nosed monkeys because their [social groups](#) are more similar to ours.

His work involves two species of snub-nosed monkeys. One study investigates the black and white on the edge of the Himalayas where they live in forests of conifer and broad-leafed [deciduous trees](#) similar in Switzerland. This work, in the Baima Snow Mountain [Nature Reserve](#) in Yunnan, was near a village of the [ethnic minority](#) Lisu people.

His ongoing research involves the golden snub-nosed monkeys in central China where they live in the Shennongjia Nature Reserve and are fed three times a day. They tolerate close human contact.

The monkeys are listed as either critically endangered or endangered and the Chinese government is working to protect them as part of the nation's [natural heritage](#).

"The black and white snub-nosed monkeys aren't used to humans so we watched them from a distance through binoculars," Assistant Professor Grueter said. "By taking scan samples and measuring the distances between individuals, we found they showed levels of tolerance to monkeys not in their kinship groups.

"When the young males turn three, they leave the natal group and form bachelor groups. Particularly in the mating season - autumn - there's a lot of aggression between the bachelor males and the resident males.

"This study is the most detailed of this species' social group because it lasted for almost two years. In current research we're looking at the

golden snub-nosed monkeys to get data about individual life histories and behavioural strategies. Already in this research we've found that males of different groups cooperate with each other against the bachelors, forming joint patrols."

Provided by University of Western Australia

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