

New research warns of primate extinction in China

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Snubnosed Monkeys. Credit: Eva Hejda <http://fotos.naturspot.de/> [CC BY-SA 2.0 de (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/de/deed.en>)], via Wikimedia Commons

Up to 80 per cent of China's primate species are at risk of extinction according to a new study by a group of international primatologists including The University of Western Australia.

The research was published in *Biodiversity and Conservation* and involved scientists from China, the United States, South Africa, Mexico, Brazil and Australia, who examined how recent human-induced environmental changes had accelerated the demise of China's primate population.

China is a hotspot of global significance for primates, but 80 per cent of China's 25 [primate species](#) are threatened and two species have recently vanished.

The researchers modelled the conflict between agricultural expansion and primate distributions in China over the next 25 to 75 years and found that unless environmental policies were strengthened, primate distributions were expected to shrink by an additional 51 to 87 per cent by the year 2100, resulting in the extinction of many monkey and ape species.

The scientists are urging China to create a national agency of environmental information focused on public awareness and education, and targeted programs of habitat restoration to return degraded forests to a more natural state.

One of the paper's authors Dr. Cyril Grueter, from UWA's School of Human Sciences, said China's spiralling development over recent decades had taken a massive toll on its environment and fauna, in particular its magnificent primates such as the enigmatic snub-nosed monkeys.

"Fortunately China is aware of the plight of its natural heritage and has amassed the economic and intellectual capital to become a driving force in wildlife conservation," Dr. Grueter said.

Co-author Professor Ruliang Pan, an adjunct senior research fellow

from UWA's School of Human Sciences, said over the past 40 years, social and economic development in China had depended primarily on the depletion of natural resources and land conversion.

"The result is that non-human [primates](#), like other animals in China, are facing an extinction crisis," Professor Pan said.

Senior author Professor Paul Garber, from the University of Illinois, said [non-human primates](#) represented our closest living relatives, played an important role in maintaining the health of tropical forest ecosystems and served as models for understanding human evolution, health, behaviour, biology, cognition, and sociality.

"Primates have existed in China for some 55 million years. However, in the face of unprecedented and unsustainable [environmental change](#) and the demands of a large human population, unless changes are implemented immediately the vast majority of these species will become extinct or effectively extinct by the end of the century," Professor Garber said.

"China is facing a historic moment and has one final opportunity to balance economic growth and environmental sustainability, or face the unprecedented loss of animal and plant biodiversity."

More information: Baoguo Li et al. The primate extinction crisis in China: immediate challenges and a way forward, *Biodiversity and Conservation* (2018). [DOI: 10.1007/s10531-018-1614-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10531-018-1614-y)

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