

Impending extinction crisis for non-human primates spurs a call for action

19 January 2017, by Jim Shelton



Chained pet long-tailed macaque (*Macaca fascicularis*) in Java, Indonesia. Credit: A. Walmsley and Little Fireface Project

The plight of Earth's primates has prompted researchers around the world to call for sweeping societal changes before hundreds of non-human species are driven to extinction.

Thirty-one prominent scientists, including Yale University biological anthropologist Eduardo Fernandez-Duque, recently co-authored a call to action in the journal *Science Advances*. The researchers said continuing deforestation has placed a majority of primate species worldwide in jeopardy, with about 60% of the world's non-human primate species threatened with extinction.

"We must strive, more than ever before, to work across disciplines. This is an impending crisis that requires biologists and environmentalists to come together with economists, politicians, and policymakers," said Fernandez-Duque, who has studied [owl monkeys](#), [titi monkeys](#), and sakis in the Chaco of Argentina and the Amazon of Ecuador for two decades.

"This is not only a scientific issue," Fernandez-

Duque said. "This is a global problem, one that requires global collaboration."

There are more than 500 primate species worldwide, including lemurs, lorises, galagos, tarsiers, monkeys, and apes. According to Fernandez-Duque and his colleagues, [non-human primates](#) offer unique insights into human evolution, biology, behavior, and the threat of emerging diseases. In addition, they provide an essential component of tropical biodiversity, contributing to forest regeneration and ecosystem health.

Yet about 75% of non-human primate species have declining populations, the researchers note, calling the situation "dire." The researchers cited extensive forest loss—due to industrial agriculture, large-scale cattle ranching, logging, oil and gas drilling, mining, dam building, and the construction of new roads—as the main pressure being put on primate habitats.

The *Science Advances* article calls on government officials, scientists, international organizations, NGOs, the business community, and concerned citizens to push for more sustainable land-use initiatives, promote education, and help preserve traditional livelihoods that can contribute to food security and environmental conservation.

The article was co-authored by researchers from the United States, Europe, Asia, Latin America, and Africa.

"In the Neotropics where I work, the area that holds the largest number of [primate species](#) in the world, we still have a good chance of saving large pieces of forest," Fernandez-Duque said.

More information: Impending extinction crisis of the world's primates: Why primates matter. [DOI: 10.1126/sciadv.1600946](#)

Provided by Yale University

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