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Majority of primate species may vanish in next 25 to 50 years



All apes are under threat

Conservation International/photo by Russell A. Mittermeier

By **Andy Coghlan**

The majority of the world's primates are in deep trouble. There are as few as 20 or 30 [Hainan gibbons](#) left in China, and the trapdoor of extinction is gaping for the Javan slow loris. Even numbers of Madagascar's iconic ring-tailed lemur have slumped to around 2000.

These could be the next primates to disappear from our planet. But overall, the picture is even bleaker, with 60 per cent of all primate species globally predicted to vanish within between 25 and 50 years.

That's the gloomy conclusion from the largest ever review of the [survival prospects](#) of the world's 504 known species of non-human primate, 85 of them discovered since 2000. "This paper is a synthesis of the factors, at all scales, that are causing declines and extinctions," says Anthony Rylands of Conservation International, joint lead author of the report.

The biggest harbinger of doom is [clearance of forests for agriculture](#), both by local farmers and by big agro-industrial producers of commodities such as palm oil and rubber. Between 1990 and 2010, for example, agricultural expansion into primate habitats was estimated at 1.5 million square kilometres, an area three times that of France.

Save our species

"Our paper is a plea to address the consequences of destruction and degradation of primate habitats worldwide," says Rylands.

"Agriculture as a threat can only be dealt with at all scales, influenced as it is by global trends, by government policies, corporate practices and malpractices, and regional and local policies."

Much effort could focus on just four countries – Brazil, Indonesia, Madagascar and the Democratic Republic of the Congo – which host two-thirds of all primate species. [Madagascar](#) could be a good place to start as all 111 of its lemurs are unique to the island, and 94 per cent are threatened.

"Madagascar is far and away the highest primate conservation priority, in a land area that's less than 1 per cent of all known primate habitat, but which in Madagascar is already 90 per cent cleared," says co-author Russell Mittermeier, also at Conservation

International. “The most endangered there is the northern sportive lemur, down to just 50 individuals.”

All 39 ape species and subspecies, including [orangutans](#), are now ranked as threatened with extinction. All 19 colobus species in Africa are threatened, with 12 critically endangered or endangered. And all Asian lorises are in trouble, not just from habitat loss but also through poaching and trade in their body parts.

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Read more: [Last chance plan to save world’s rarest ape, the Hainan gibbon](#); [On the trail of some of the world’s rarest monkeys](#)