

PRIMATES IN PERIL REPORT: ENVIRONMENT

NEWS: Cross River Gorilla, Tapanuli Orangutan among 25 most endangered primates: Report

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

The "Primates in Peril 2023–2025" report lists the world's 25 most endangered primates, highlighting critical threats across continents, with India's Phayre's Langur and Western Hoolock Gibbon narrowly missing the list despite severe population declines.

Context:

- An international team of primate researchers released the report titled "Primates in Peril: The World's 25 Most Endangered Primates 2023–2025."
- The report draws attention to the urgent conservation needs of the world's most threatened primate species across different continents.

What are Primates?

1. Definition and Classification:

- Primates are a group of mammals that includes monkeys, apes, lemurs, and humans.
- They are biologically classified into two major suborders:
- Strepsirrhines (wet-nosed primates) – e.g., lemurs, lorises, galagos (bush babies).
- Haplorhines (dry-nosed primates) – e.g., tarsiers, monkeys, and apes including humans.

2. Key Features of Primates:

- Large brain-to-body size ratio – Enables complex behavior, problem-solving, and social interaction.
- Binocular and color vision – Provides good depth perception and ability to detect ripe fruits and predators.
- Flexible limbs and shoulder joints – Adapted for climbing and arboreal (tree-dwelling) life.

- Opposable thumbs (in most primates) – Essential for grasping, tool use, and manipulating objects.

3. Size Range:

- Smallest primate: *Madame Berthe's mouse lemur* (~30 grams).
- Largest primate: *Eastern gorilla* (can exceed 200 kg).

Key Findings of the Report (2023–2025):

1. Geographic Distribution of the 25 Most Endangered Primates:

- Africa: 6 species
- Madagascar: 4 species
- Asia: 9 species
- South America (Neotropics): 6 species

2. Top Critically Endangered Species:

- Cross River Gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla diehli*):
- Habitat: Nigeria and Cameroon
- Threats: Habitat loss, poaching, and human conflict
- Tapanuli Orangutan (*Pongo tapanuliensis*):
- Habitat: Northern Sumatra, Indonesia
- It is the most threatened great ape in the world.

India's Relevance in the Report:

1. Two Indian primates were considered but not included in the final 25 list:

- Phayre's Langur (*Trachypithecus phayrei*):
- Habitat: Northeastern India, Eastern Bangladesh, Western Myanmar
- Status: Endangered on IUCN Red List for over 20 years
- Threats: Estimated 50–80% population decline over three generations due to habitat loss and fragmentation
- Western Hoolock Gibbon (*Hoolock hoolock*):

- India's only ape species
- Habitat: Northeastern India, Bangladesh, Myanmar
- Threats:
 - Deforestation
 - Infrastructure projects
 - Agricultural expansion
 - Encroachment into forest areas

Recommendations for Conservation:

1. Conservation Action Plans:

- Need for scientific assessments of:
 - Population size
 - Genetic health and diversity
 - Viability of small, isolated populations

2. Enhancing Habitat Connectivity:

- Strategies include:
 - Forest restoration
 - Creation of wildlife corridors
 - Cross-border conservation initiatives to ensure free movement of species between countries

3. Legal and Institutional Frameworks:

- Strengthen law enforcement against poaching and illegal wildlife trade.
- Enhance environmental awareness and education to build public support for conservation.
- Build capacity at the national and regional level for monitoring and protection.

4. Translocation:

- Involves relocating animals from fragmented or degraded habitats to better-suited, protected areas.
- Used to prevent inbreeding and increase survival chances of endangered populations.

5. Rewilding:

- Focuses on reintroducing confiscated or rescued primates back into their natural habitats.
- Supports ecological balance and restores native biodiversity.

Conclusion:

- The “Primates in Peril” report highlights global biodiversity loss and the urgent need for targeted primate conservation.
- For India, the exclusion of Phayre’s Langur and Western Hoolock Gibbon should serve as a warning sign.
- A comprehensive, science-based, and inclusive conservation strategy is essential to protect endangered primates, preserve ecological integrity, and uphold international biodiversity commitments.

Source: <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/wildlife-biodiversity/cross-river-gorilla-tapanuli-orangutan-among-the-25-most-endangered-primates-report>