

Environment

Chimps and orangutans among species in danger of being wiped out in imminent mass extinction of primates, scientists warn

Countries home to two thirds of world's apes, monkeys and lemurs will see populations pushed to breaking point by end of century

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Chimpanzees are among the primate species threatened globally by human activities such as habitat destruction and hunting (AFP)

Primate species including chimpanzees and **orangutans** are on the **brink of extinction**, and scientists fear that without a concerted global effort they will soon be gone for good.

An international group of primate experts has called for urgent action after finding parts of the world home to the most monkeys, lemurs and apes will see those populations pushed to breaking point by the end of the century.

Just four countries harbour two thirds of all primate species – Brazil, Madagascar, Indonesia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) – and 60 per cent of those species are threatened with extinction.

Among them are some of our closest relatives, including **chimpanzees**, orangutans and lowland gorillas.



Scores of primates face 'impending extinction', 31 scientists warn

The situation is particularly bleak in Madagascar and Indonesia. Both are home to dozens of species, over 90 per cent of which are rapidly declining in numbers.

Using information from World Bank and United Nations databases, the group led by scientists at Oxford Brookes University explored likely future scenarios in these four primate-rich nations.

Sizeable losses were predicted in the other three nations too, with Indonesia, Madagascar and the DRC racking up habitat depletions of roughly 70, 60 and 30 per cent respectively.

The expansion of farming is the biggest threat posed to these animals, as forests are felled to make way for palm oil and sugarcane production.

British mammals' fight for survival



Additional pressures such as illegal hunting and trade are pushing primates even closer to breaking point.

The analysis follows **previous warnings** of “impending extinction” for many of the world’s primates, in which the scientific community demanded immediate action.

The scientists behind the new report – **published in the journal *PeerJ*** – warned that everyone from national lawmakers to the general public has a role to play in preventing a mass extinction.

“Many iconic species will be lost unless these countries, international organisations, consumer nations and global citizens take immediate action to protect primate populations and their habitats,” said Professor Anna Nekaris, a primate conservation expert at Oxford Brookes University.

“People do not realise that in their daily lives, by consuming less and making more ecologically friendly consumer choices, such as reducing use of single-use plastic and eating food grown locally, they can have direct impacts on tropical forests and the long-term sustainability of biodiversity.”

Unfortunately, many of the areas where primates thrive are also characterised by high levels of human poverty and weak governance – factors that often drive overexploitation of primate-rich habitats.



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Borneo has lost half its orangutans due to hunting and habitat loss

The research team found that only relatively small fractions of primate habitats in the four target nations are located inside national parks and reserves, meaning many populations are left unprotected. Even within protected regions, previous research has demonstrated that large swathes are being destroyed as human activities like road building and urbanisation encroach on them.

“More protected areas are needed together with corridors along latitudinal and altitudinal gradients to reduce isolation, along with forest restoration projects that can be beneficial to people’s livelihoods,” said Dr Susan Cheyne, one of the report’s co-authors.

The researchers also called for more effective enforcement of laws prohibiting hunting and trading in these endangered creatures, as well as excessive deforestation.

Conservationists in Borneo **have reported** that even in peat forests explicitly protected by the Indonesian government, logging is still taking place and placing key orangutan groups in danger. The island **has lost more than 100,000 orangutans** in the space of just 16 years as a result of hunting and habitat loss.