

Malaysia's primate species in peril

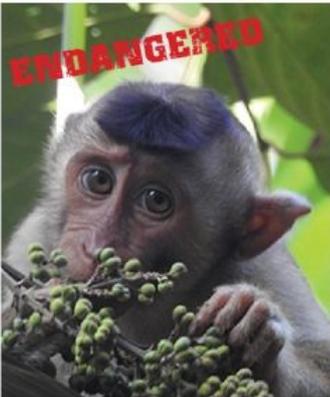
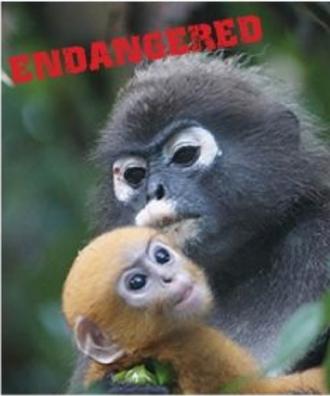
NATION

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By **ASHLEY TANG**

PETALING JAYA: The status of four primates in Malaysia has been downgraded in the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) updated Red List of Threatened Species, says the Malaysian Primatological Society (MPS).

MPS secretary-general Aini Hasanah Abd Mutalib said the four primates were the southern pig-tailed macaques (*Macaca nemestrina*), long-tailed macaques (*Macaca fascicularis*), dusky langurs (*Trachypithecus obscurus*) and the greater slow loris (*Nycticebus coucang*).

IUCN RED LIST OF THREATENED SPECIES	
Southern pig-tailed macaques (<i>Macaca nemestrina</i>)	Long-tailed macaques (<i>Macaca fascicularis</i>)
 <p>Habitat: Forest, Artificial/ Terrestrial</p> <p>Threats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > housing and urban areas > annual and perennial non-timber crops > hunting and trapping terrestrial animals > logging and wood harvesting <p>Photo: Liu Kungeng, Macaca Nemestrina Project</p>	 <p>Habitat: Forest, Wetlands (inland), Artificial/ Terrestrial</p> <p>Threats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > hunting and trapping terrestrial animals <p>Photo: Jean-Christophe Vi (IUCN)</p>
Dusky langurs (<i>Trachypithecus obscurus</i>)	Greater slow loris (<i>Nycticebus coucang</i>)
 <p>Habitat: Forest, Artificial/ Terrestrial</p> <p>Threats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > housing and urban areas > annual and perennial non-timber crops > wood and pulp plantations > roads and railroads > hunting and trapping terrestrial animals > logging and wood harvesting <p>Photo: Yap Jo Leen, Langur Project Penang</p>	 <p>Habitat: Forest, Artificial/ Terrestrial</p> <p>Threats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > annual and perennial non-timber crops > wood and pulp plantations > hunting and trapping terrestrial animals > logging and wood harvesting <p>Photo: AFP</p>

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According to the IUCN, the southern pig-tailed macaques and greater slow loris fell from vulnerable to endangered while the dusky langurs went from near threatened to endangered.

The long-tailed macaques, meanwhile, was downgraded from least concerned to vulnerable.

The IUCN categorises species into nine categories: not evaluated, data deficient, least concerned, near threatened, vulnerable, endangered, critically endangered, extinct in the wild and extinct.

Aini Hasanah said there were various reasons that contributed to the deterioration of Malaysia's species in the IUCN list.

"In general, forest loss and fragmentation directly contributed to the loss of terrestrial biodiversity and threatens existing populations while converted habitat may support biodiversity (but) most studies show that converted habitats such as agricultural lands have far lower species compared to forests.

"Habitat fragmentation also makes remaining forests more accessible for poaching and hunting, and can lead to conflicts such as crop raiding which may lead to killings. Some species are also removed or killed for the illegal pet or wildlife trade," she said in an email interview.

On July 9, IUCN released its updated Red List of Threatened Species covering more than 120,000 species it monitors.

According to the IUCN, in its summary statistics, Malaysia has 81 mammals listed on its list of threatened species.

Aini Hasanah added that conservation planning in Malaysia often emphasised on terrestrial species such as tigers, elephants and tapirs.

"But unfortunately, arboreal primates, who depend on trees to survive, are often neglected.

"Sometimes, poor understanding of forest loss and population dynamics within remaining fragments hamper feasible conservation efforts of primates.

"Primates who are more adaptable and can shift their home range into human-inhabited areas may cause nuisance as crop raiders or pests.

"Humans feeding primates at public parks or tourism areas may mean well but could also contribute to this condition. Consequently, macaques are often culled and relocated, which further threatens their population," she said.

In the updated Red List, Aini Hasanah added that orang utans have continued to remain critically endangered, the last class before being extinct in the wild.



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(*Nasalis larvatus*) and other Bornean primates have remained endangered on the list.

Asked if there were any species that have made improvements, MPS scientific adviser Dr Nadine Ruppert noted that “most species were doing worse”.

“We need to quickly address the issue by working together with all stakeholders, including the government, NGOs and communities, to save the habitat and population of Malaysia’s charismatic wildlife, including primates,” she said.

Ruppert, who is also Universiti Sains Malaysia school of biological sciences senior lecturer and head of primate research and conservation lab, said action plan strategies should encompass wildlife protection in their natural habitat, as well as enforcement of policies and building capacity and awareness among local communities to protect threatened species.

“For example, protecting existing forests or reforest deteriorated habitats, creating wildlife corridors and forest buffer zones in agricultural areas or canopy bridges in urban areas to reconnect forest fragments, or to have strict no-feeding laws for wildlife, are some measures to tackle these issues.

“We should have stricter laws to ban the advertisement of wildlife on social media. The public must stop the demand for wildlife, especially primates, as pets or wildlife parts for medicinal purposes.

“The illegal international wildlife trade is a horrendous crime threatening hundreds of species and now indicated in the rise of emerging infectious diseases such as Covid-19.

“If this current global pandemic isn’t a wake-up call to protect nature, nothing else will be,” she said.

TAGS / KEYWORDS:

Primates , **IUCN** , **Malaysian Primatological Society**

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