

Conservation Assessment and Management Plan Workshop for South Asian Primates—Red Listing at the Regional Level

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Introduction

The IUCN Red Data Books and, more recently, the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, have relied on what has been, to a great extent, indirect information. IUCN Specialist Group Chairpersons or their designates have to collect information on a large number of species from specialists all over the world. Most often the information is 2nd or 3rd hand by the time it reaches IUCN and may also be incomplete. The Conservation Assessment and Management Plan (CAMP) Workshop provides a means for currently working field biologists from the range states of the taxon group to actively participate in Red Listing the species they study. Such a workshop was held from 5 to 9 March in Coimbatore at the State Forest Service College for Primates of South Asia. The workshop also provided an opportunity for field biologists from the region and members of the Primate Specialist Group responsible for revising primate taxonomy to interact, in order to review, refine and confirm aspects of the new taxonomy.

Background

Primates are man's nearest living relatives in the animal kingdom. Due to their similarity to man both in behaviour and appearance they

are objects of fascination, as well as delight and even disgust. Primate numbers vary from a very few dozen in some remote forest areas to hundreds and thousands which have found a comfortable environment for themselves, although not to the liking of their human relatives, even in cities. Primates play an important ecological role serving as seed dispersers, prey for carnivorous animals, etc. Habitat loss, hunting and development has led to the decline in populations of many primate species throughout South Asia.

In 1997, a Conservation Assessment and Management Plan CAMP workshop for Indian mammals was held at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore under the auspices of the Biodiversity Conservation Prioritization Project (BCPP). In this workshop, which was conducted by the Conservation Breeding Specialist Group (CBSG), India among others, 15 primates were considered but not all could be assessed due to insufficient participation of primatologists from different parts of the country. The IUCN status for Indian endemic species, as derived by the workshop using the then new 1994 IUCN Red List criteria, was used by the Primate Specialist Group in their recommendations for the 2000 Red List. The 2000 IUCN Red List also included endemic



Indian primate subspecies which had not been considered in the 1997 BCPP CAMP. As a result of the taxonomic revisions, it can be said that South Asia is rich in varieties of primates. Now, there are 45 species and subspecies of primates in South Asia, a number of them endemic to the region.

The taxonomic revisions which have taken place since 1997 and are still under review affect the number, nomenclature and status of several primate species and subspecies. This and the insufficiency of the 1997 output led to an initiative by CBSG, South Asia and the Primate Specialist Group to organize a CAMP Review with primates of the entire South Asian region also included. South Asia is defined as the 7 countries which make up the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), e.g. Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The workshop was held from 5 to 9 March 2002, hosted by the State Forest Service College in R.S. Puram, Coimbatore.

CAMP Workshop

Despite the fact that primate studies have been going on for many years, there were still a number of important localities which had not been covered. The Indo-US Primate Project, a mega-project spanning several years, aimed to address the primary gaps in knowledge of primate distribution and decline. This was sponsored by the US Fish and Wildlife Service in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, and generated much new information about primates in the lesser known areas. This and the need for cooperation and collaboration between SAARC countries' biologists were also factors that led to the organization of the workshop.

CAMP stands for Conservation Assessment

and Management Plan. A CAMP workshop has several unique features, the first of them being that it is considered a 'process' rather than an end in itself. Species and habitats are under continuous human pressure, but at the same time there are initiatives to protect and improve habitats, and save species. Therefore, after assessing species on the basis of their population, distribution, habitat quality, and threats and categorizing them in any given year, it is quite likely that 3–5 years later, there will be a change—for better or for worse—sometimes a significant change. CAMP reviews, then, provide a method of monitoring whole taxon groups nationally, regionally and even globally. CAMP workshops also try to include specialists from a variety of institutions with a deliberate effort to avoid bias of any kind.

CAMP participants are encouraged to prepare for the workshop by sending information sheets ahead of time, even if they cannot attend, and to bring their field notes. Establishing that the primary goal is an objective, scientific output for the good of the species is intended to create an atmosphere of trust in which participants feel comfortable parting with information. One of the strengths of CAMP workshops is that a large amount of information which normally remains in the head of the field biologist, finds its way onto paper and into record so that management actions to protect species can be recommended. In many instances, facts held by individual field biologists may be insufficient for drawing a conclusion, but when combined with that of other field workers, provide enough data to assess a species applying the IUCN Red List Criteria, derive a category of threat and suggest recommendations for conservation action. The process of assessment of threat status relies on participants' knowledge of population decline and habitat deterioration



in specific areas over a particular time span as well as a variety of other factors.

The South Asian Primate CAMP had the endorsement of the IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group, the IUCN SSC Conservation Breeding Specialist Group, the Ministry of Environment and Forests, the Regional Biodiversity Programme, Asia and the Indo-US Primate Project. It was sponsored by Conservation International, USA, other conservation organizations and zoological parks from USA and Europe. Fifty-five participants from 4 South Asian countries, USA and UK attended the 5-day workshop. Two more countries, Pakistan and Bhutan, could contribute to the workshop by exchanging emails throughout the exercise. Participants were primarily field biologists. However, primate taxonomist Dr Douglas Brandon-Jones, Primate Specialist Group Vice-Chair for Asia, Dr Ardith Eudey, trade expert, Manoj Misra as well as several foresters were also present.

A CAMP workshop is run by objective facilitators who attempt to provide a range of alternatives so that participants can select the method and means of going about assessing species. Everything is agreed upon through consensus in a plenary session, from the list of species to be undertaken to the additional subjects to be discussed. There are Ground Rules which are intended to insure that agreed goals can be achieved during workshop but these are sufficiently flexible to allow the addition of new features. The major work takes place in working groups, organized by taxon or region, with participants filling in detailed forms called Taxon Data Sheets.

New Studies, New Taxonomy

Every CAMP workshop is different, depending on the taxon group and the biologists who

study the taxa. In the case of the Primate CAMP 2002, the new taxonomy provided a challenge both to facilitators and participants. Participants were provided with complete reference material on the last few years of taxonomic nomenclatural evolution and then given an opportunity to discuss their options. After much discussion, participants decided to use the list given in a paper still under review by Brandon-Jones *et al.*, which is the output of a Primate Specialist Group taxonomy workshop held in 2000. It was felt by participants that the taxonomy proposed in this paper was most practical for them and also that, with the author being present, he would be in a position to explain subtle points accurately. Participants were more accepting of the *Semnopithecus entellus* being divided into subspecies, as per Brandon-Jones *et al.*, rather than species as last published.

In the case of primates, it was assumed that more information was available with field biologists. So a table for listing localities in more detail was included in the Taxon Data Sheets. This new feature proved to be very useful, particularly in view of the new taxonomy. By listing localities first and taking the help of the taxonomist, the field biologists who had not done their studies on the basis of the revised taxonomy, it could still derive an IUCN threat category for new taxa. Also they assembled a configuration of facts about primate species which, due to lack of opportunity to sit together and discuss, had never been collected before. The bulk of information available about primates in many different areas compared to other taxon groups, is in large part a reflection of the last decade of studies undertaken under the auspices of the Indo-US Primate Project in India, the Smithsonian Project in Sri Lanka, as well as smaller projects by other conservation organizations. This should prove en-



couraging to governments and conservation organizations to continue and enhance the funding of primate research as well as that of other taxon groups.

After listing localities and the other information required in the Taxon Data Sheet and deriving a threat category, participants were well armed to make recommendations for species conservation. In addition, participants in the different working groups drew up individual Species Action Plans for all threatened species and many others as well. During discussions of Working Groups, various issues arise which require discussion at a broader level, so, towards the end of a CAMP Workshop, 'Special Issue' Working Groups are formed. In the Primate CAMP, Special Issue Working Groups were formed for the following topics: Urban monkey problem; Funding field studies; Education and Species Conservation Action; *Semnopithecus entellus* taxonomy; and Captive breeding. During these discussions, Taxon Data Sheets for all 45 species and subspecies were assembled into a Draft Report and given to all participants for vetting when they return home. Once they return their comments and corrections, a Report will be brought out and distributed to participants, policy makers, politicians, wildlife and related agencies and institutions and—in an appropriate form—the public.

The 2000 Red List of Threatened Species had categorized 53 species and subspecies of South Asian primates. As a result of having many currently working field biologists from the range, it was possible to confirm many more threatened species than previously thought. Also with taxonomists subdividing the single

langur species into several subspecies reported in restricted numbers in specialized habitats, instead of one species of langur which was of 'Least concern', there are many distinct populations/subspecies of langurs which are threatened and require immediate protection.

In the workshop, 36 of the 45 species and subspecies of primates were categorized as 'threatened' as opposed to 22 of the 53 species of South Asian primates in the 2000 Red List. The final assessment will be ascertained only after receiving corrected Taxon Data Sheets. There are likely to be close to 6 species or subspecies of South Asian primates categorized as Critically Endangered, 24 Endangered, and 5 Vulnerable under the IUCN 2000 Red List Criteria. Ten species were not threatened or Data Deficient. Being assessed and ranked in any of the IUCN threatened categories implies a relatively high to extremely high risk of extinction in the near or relatively near future.

Also, the primate biologists were more accepting of lower subspecific taxonomic orders than specialists of other taxon groups, such as the chiroptera of which 130 bats were assessed in January at the species level only with a similar number of bat field biologists.

Wildlife agencies and conservation NGOs will use the information generated to make management plans and strategies for saving primates from extinction. Also the output from the workshop will find a place in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2003. This will be an encouragement to local field biologists from South Asia to continue and intensify their studies, which have far-reaching and effective ramifications.

