



MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE FOR EVOLUTIONARY ANTHROPOLOGY

This baby western lowland silverback gorilla is part of a group that has survived in the northern part of the Republic of Congo – so many that environmentalists can double population estimates, according to a report released yesterday. However, many other primates are in danger of extinction, according to the report.

Primates 'being eaten to extinction'

New study has good news and bad – but mainly very bad

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

PARIS – Nearly half the world's species of primates face extinction unless urgent action is taken to curb hunting and protect their natural habitat, according to a new study.

While destruction of rainforests has always been seen as the greatest threat, hunting has become an equally devastating factor, according to researchers behind the Red List of Threatened Species, naming 300 of the 634 species of ape and monkey that could disappear.

"In many places, primates are quite literally being eaten to extinction," said Russell Mittermeier, from the International Union for the Conservation of

Nature, which carried out the survey.

"We've raised concerns for years about primates being in peril, but now we have solid data to show the situation is far more severe than imagined," Mittermeier said.

Jean-Christian Vie, deputy head of the IUCN's species program, said the situation in southeast Asia was "terrifying," with 90 per cent of primate species in Vietnam and Cambodia at risk, partly due to their being hunted for Chinese medicine ingredients.

Overall in Asia, 70 per cent of primates are under threat of being wiped out.

"To have a group of animals under such a high level of threat

is, quite frankly, unlike anything we have recorded among any other group of species to date," Vie said.

In Africa, 11 of the 13 kinds of red colobus monkeys are listed as at threat, while two may already be extinct: Bouvier's red colobus (*Procolobus pennantii bouvieri*) and Miss Waldron's red colobus (*Procolobus badius waldroni*).

"Among the African species, the great apes such as gorillas and bonobos have always tended to grab the limelight," said International Primatological Society president Richard Wrangham.

"Even though they are deeply threatened, it is smaller primates such as the red colobus that could die out first," he said.

Elsewhere, species from tiny mouse lemurs to 120-kilogram mountain gorillas face challenges to survive, says the report.

Scientists are continuing to find previously unknown

species, though they fear some may die out even before they are discovered.

Not all the news is bad, says the report, which points to several species that have recovered thanks to conservation programs.

In Brazil, for example, two species of squirrel-sized tamarins have been taken off the critically endangered list, though future survival depends on protecting their forest habitat.

Researchers are also considering reclassifying the mountain gorilla due to increased populations in their only habitat – the protected highland forests of Rwanda, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

A global network of more than 1,000 governments and non-governmental organizations, IUCN reports draw on the expertise of more than 10,000 volunteer scientists. It's Red List is widely used as an index of species endangerment.