

Increased use of snares in Southeast Asia driving extinction crisis, scientists warn

25 January 2017 / **Mike Gaworecki**

An extinction crisis is emerging in Southeast Asia due to an increase in snares that are wiping out wildlife in unprecedented numbers.



- *The authors of an article published in Science last week say that unsustainable hunting methods both inside and outside of protected areas, mainly the use of homemade wire snares that kill or maim any animal entrapped by them, is pushing numerous large mammals to the brink of extinction.*
- *Because the snares are indiscriminate in what they catch, they frequently result in the capture of nontarget species, as well as females and young animals.*
- *Hundreds of thousands of snares are removed from protected forests in Southeast Asia every year, the authors of the Science article write, but law enforcement and snare removal teams can't keep up with the pace that they're being set by poachers.*

An extinction crisis is emerging in Southeast Asia due to an increase in snares that are wiping out wildlife in unprecedented numbers, according to an article published in the journal [Science](#) last week.

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The authors of the article say that unsustainable hunting methods both inside and outside of protected areas, mainly the use of homemade wire snares that kill or maim any animal entrapped by them, is pushing "some of the planet's most distinctive and imperiled mammals," species like Indochinese leopards (*Panthera pardus delacouri*), saola (*Pseudoryx nghetinhensis*), and tigers (*Panthera tigris*), as well as more common terrestrial mammals, to the brink of extinction.

"Snares generate substantial wasted by-catch, which is often left to rot in the forest," write the authors, a group of scientists from academic institutions including James Cook University, Saint Paul

University, University of Minnesota, and Oregon State University, as well as NGOs Global Wildlife Conservation, Wildlife Alliance, Wildlife Conservation Society, and WWF.

Because the snares are indiscriminate in what they catch, they frequently result in the capture of nontarget species, as well as females and young animals. "They particularly affect mammals that cover large ranges, including many Threatened species (as classified by the IUCN) that have vital ecological roles in forests," the authors add.

An [August 2016 study](#) found evidence that animal populations have declined sharply across Southeast Asia since 1980, with many species' population numbers completely decimated in substantial portions of their ranges. And while deforestation and forest degradation are typically seen as the most significant threats to biodiversity in the region, the authors of the study determined that **over-hunting was "by far" the more severe threat** to the survival of Southeast Asia's endangered vertebrates.

A pile of snares. Photo by Lorraine Scotson/Free the Bears.

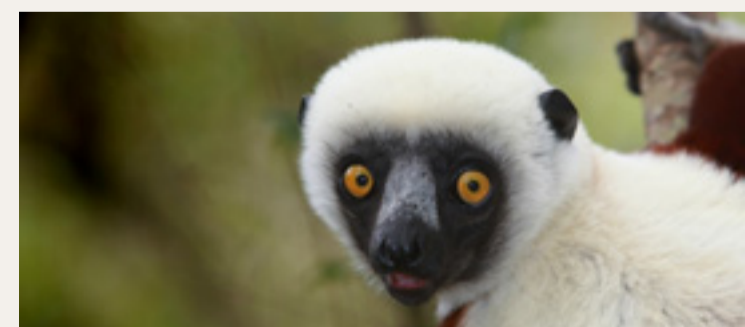
There are a number of causes for this over-hunting epidemic cited by the authors of the study, including improved access to forests and markets driven by cheap outboard motors and motorbikes; increasing demand for wild meat, wild animals as pets, and medicinal products derived from wildlife; and improved hunting technologies, such as mist nets, modern guns, and wire snares, which reduce the skill required to hunt.



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Hundreds of thousands of snares are removed from protected forests in Southeast Asia every year, the authors of the Science article write, but law enforcement and snare removal teams can't keep up with the pace that they're being set by poachers.

For instance, the number of snares removed by law enforcement patrols in Cambodia's Southern Cardamom National Park increased from 14,364 in 2010 to 27,714 in 2015, the authors note. Despite these efforts, large mammals are still in trouble. The Indochinese leopard, for instance, today occupies just [eight percent of its historic range](#) in Cambodia – and leopard territory across Southeast Asia is down some 94 percent.

So many animals are being caught in snares every year that the authors warn many Southeast Asian tropical forests could soon be facing "empty forest syndrome," in which the ecosystem is devoid of large mammals that provide a range of vital functions, from seed dispersal to ensuring that smaller predators and herbivores do not become overabundant.

"Only legislative reform that penalizes the possession of snares, and materials used for their construction, inside protected areas can combat this ongoing wildlife crisis in Asian forests," the authors write. "Without such reforms and their enforcement, the specter of 'empty forests' will become even more likely."

The snared paw of a ferret badger. Photo by Lorraine Scotson/Free the Bears.

An Indochinese leopard (Panthera pardus delacouri) at the Saigon Zoo and Botanical Gardens in Vietnam. Photo via Wikimedia Commons.

CITATION

- Gray, T. N., Lynam, A. J., Seng, T., Laurance, W. F., Long, B., Scotson, L., & Ripple, W. J. (2017). Wildlife-snaring crisis in Asian forests. *Science*, 355(6322), 255-256. [doi:10.1126/science.aal4463](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aal4463)
- Harrison, R.D., Sreekar, R., Brodie, J.F., Brook, S., Luskin, M., O'Kelly, H., Rao, M., Scheffers, B., & Velho, N. (2016). Impacts of hunting on tropical forests in Southeast Asia. *Conservation Biology* 30 (5), 972–981. [doi:10.1111/cobi.12785](https://doi.org/10.1111/cobi.12785)

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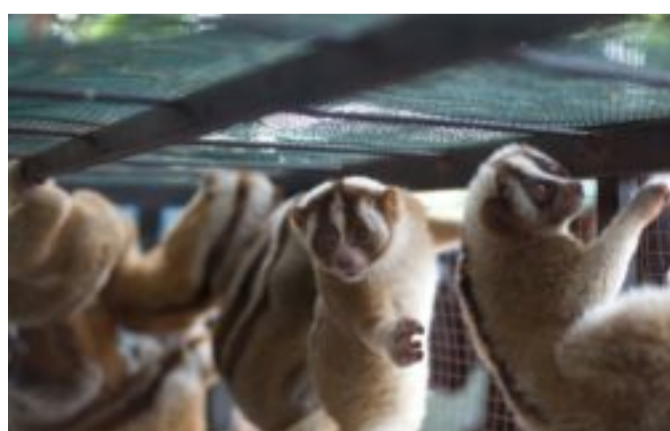
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