

95 percent of all lemur species face high risk of extinction, experts say

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- *More than 50 experts in primate conservation from around the world recently convened in Antananarivo to review the conservation status of the 111 species and subspecies of lemurs, all endemic to Madagascar, and provide updated threat assessments for the IUCN Red List.*
- *They found that 105 lemurs — 95 percent of all known lemur species and subspecies — might qualify as critically endangered, endangered, or vulnerable to extinction in the wild.*
- *The updated assessments produced by the IUCN Species Survival Commission Primate Specialist Group must still undergo a review process before they are fully validated, but the group's findings would increase the number of lemurs listed as critically endangered on the IUCN Red List from 24 to 38.*

Together with other leading primate conservationists, Russell Mittermeier, Chief Conservation Officer for the NGO Global Wildlife Conservation and recently announced winner of the 2018 Indianapolis Prize is sounding the alarm about the plight of lemurs. Mittermeier, who also serves as chair of the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) Primate Specialist Group, was one of more than 50 experts in primate conservation from around the world who recently convened in Antananarivo to review the conservation status of the 111 species and subspecies of lemurs, all endemic to Madagascar, and provide updated threat assessments for the IUCN Red List. They found that 105 lemurs — 95 percent of all known lemur species and subspecies — might qualify as critically endangered, endangered, or vulnerable to extinction in the wild.

“This is, without a doubt, the highest percentage of threat for any large group of mammals and for any large group of vertebrates,” Mittermeier said in a statement released yesterday

“This assessment not only highlights the very high extinction risk Madagascar's unique lemurs face, but it is indicative of the grave threats to Madagascar biodiversity as a whole. Madagascar's unique and wonderful species are its greatest asset, its most distinctive brand and the basis for a major ecotourism industry.”

There are a number of threats to lemurs' survival in Madagascar, chief among them the widespread destruction of their tropical forest habitat. Illegal logging and deforestation driven by slash-and-burn agriculture, charcoal production, and mining continue to jeopardize what's left of Madagascar's forests. And according to the IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group's experts, new data points to hunting of lemurs for food and for the pet trade as an emerging but serious threat.



A Verreaux's sifaka in Berenty, Madagascar. Photo by Russ Mittermeier.

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Meanwhile, 44 lemurs would be listed as endangered based on the group's new assessments, and 23 would be listed as vulnerable. In total, 12 species of lemur would be newly categorized as threatened since the Primate Specialist Group held its last workshop in July 2012.

The indri, the largest of all lemurs and a species with such symbolic value for Madagascar that it is often compared to the giant panda in China, is among the species of lemurs that would be up-listed from endangered to critically endangered. Madame Berthe's mouse lemur, the world's smallest primate, would also be up-listed if and when the assessments are validated. All nine species of sifakas would now be listed as critically endangered, as well.

Two widespread mouse lemur species are the only lemurs assessed by the group to be of "least concern," and four others were placed in the data deficient category because there was not enough information to determine their risk of extinction.



A male blue-eyed black lemur in Madagascar. The critically endangered blue-eyed black lemur is one of the few primate species other than humans that has blue eyes. Photo by Russ Mittermeier.

"This is very alarming, and we have noticed a particularly worrying increase in the level of hunting of lemurs taking place, including larger-scale commercial hunting, which is unlike anything we have seen before in Madagascar," Christoph Schwitzer, director of conservation at the Bristol Zoological Society and one of the organizers of the 2018 IUCN SSC Lemur Red List and Conservation Planning Workshop, said in a [statement](#).

While in Antananarivo, the Primate Specialist Group's experts also updated a lemur conservation action plan first developed at the 2012 workshop. Schwitzer added: "We are investing a lot of time and resources into addressing these issues and will be implementing our Lemur Action Plan over the coming years, which we are confident will make a significant difference to the current situation."

Mittermeier, who helped describe [a new species of lemur](#) earlier this year, [told Mongabay in June](#) that there might be as many as 10 or 20 more lemur species in Madagascar that have yet to be discovered. But we'll have to act fast if we want to get to know all of the lemur species in the world and ensure the survival of the species with which we're already acquainted.

"Madagascar is ridiculous, because it's about the size of Texas, and 90 percent of it has been deforested already," Mittermeier said. "What remains is maybe the size of two or three New Jerseys, not very big. And yet in that small area you have packed this incredible number of unique, endemic species found nowhere else."



*Indri female and young at Analamazaotra Special Reserve in Andasibe, Madagascar.
Photo by Russ Mittermeier.*

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