

KARNATAKA

## South India's common monkey may soon become endangered, finds study





## SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

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Researchers, including a scientist from Mysuru, have found that the common bonnet monkey of South India may soon become an endangered species.

They say the distributional range of this monkey, endemic to the southern part of the country, is shrinking in eastern Maharashtra, northern parts of Karnataka, and western Telangana because of the slow incursion of the larger, more aggressive rhesus monkey from the northern region.

The research teams, led by Mewa Singh of the University of Mysore and H.N. Kumara of Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, Coimbatore, have been systematically monitoring the population of the species in South India for over 25 years.

The outcome of the study is mentioned in a research paper written by J. Erinjery, S. Kumar, K. Mohan, T. Dhananjaya, S. Sundararaj, R. Kent, Mr. Singh, and Mr. Kumara in the peer-reviewed scientific journal PLOS ONE on August 23.

Although there are many wildlife sanctuaries and national parks in South India, intensive research in many such forests has found that the bonnet monkey is not a typically forest-dwelling species. "These monkeys have typically shared their habitats with humans, inhabiting temples, tourist spots and roadsides with banyan trees adjoining farmlands," said Prof. Singh, a lifelong distinguished professor at Biopsychology Laboratory, Institute of Excellence, University of Mysore, in a release.

### **Population halved**

The research teams have deduced that about 50% of the bonnet monkey population has "disappeared" from temples and tourist spots in the past couple of decades.

"Many single roads have now been converted into lane roads and the dense vegetation of banyan trees has been replaced by barren lands and urban structures. In the last 25 years, the population of bonnet monkeys around these roads has declined by between 50% and 65% from 2003 to 2015 alone. In other words, these monkeys are disappearing from most of their traditional habitats," Prof. Singh said.

The researchers, however, have found that the population of these monkeys has remained stable in certain areas where there are small hillocks with natural vegetation and temples. Such places can, therefore, serve as 'bonnet monkey conservation reserves' for long-term stability of the species. As the bonnet monkey shares many traits – including habitat-sharing with humans and the occasional man-animal conflict – with other animal species, their management can serve as a model for the conservation of other species, Prof. Singh said.

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