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New populations of a Critically Endangered Primate (Delacour's Langur) Confirmed in Pu Luong Nature Reserve, Thanh Hoa Province, Vietnam

Scientists from a group comprising conservation NGOs and Vietnamese national authorities today confirmed the existence of several new groups of Delacour's Langur, a Critically Endangered primate species, at Pu Luong Nature Reserve, Quan Hoa and Ba Thuoc Districts in north-west Thanh Hoa Province, Vietnam. The discovery comes at a crucial juncture for the langur, which is endemic to Northern Vietnam and considered one of the world's top 25 most endangered primate species. The discovery was made during a joint study conducted by the Endangered Primate Rescue Center (EPRC) managed by Frankfurt Zoological Society, and the Pu Luong - Cuc Phuong Conservation Project, managed by Fauna & Flora International (FFI) and the Vietnam Forest Protection Department.

Delacour's Langur, popularly named '*Vooc Mong Trang*' in Vietnamese ('the langur with white rump') on account of the white colour of its lower body and upper legs, occurs only in a belt of limestone karst mountains that stretch across northern Vietnam. This area, known as the Pu Luong – Cuc Phuong limestone range, represents the last refuge for the species whose populations are estimated to have declined by over 50% in the last ten years alone.

The population of Delacour's Langur in the wild is believed to have dwindled to a mere 300 animals. Only two of the known sub-populations comprise as many as 30-35 animals. One exists in Van Long Provincial Nature Reserve, located in Gia Vien District in Ninh Binh Province. The second has been confirmed in Pu Luong Provincial Nature Reserve by the newly reported sightings in the wild.

Tilo Nadler, Director of the EPRC, which was founded ten years ago specifically to promote efforts to conserve the Delacour's Langur, believes the latest sightings offer additional hope for the survival of the species. However, he notes that much remains to be done to prevent extinction of the langur in the wild. 'Over half of all populations of the

langurs are severely threatened by hunting, which represents the greatest short term threat to the primate. Additionally, habitat loss and further fragmentation of the remaining populations makes them extremely vulnerable to extinction’.

Programmes to strengthen law enforcement and educate the local people are urgently required. Stricter enforcement of existing anti-hunting and forest protection laws, and prosecution of offenders, is a necessity. Measures to control firearms and the rampant trade in wildlife for meat and medicine will be especially necessary for the success of efforts to conserve the species.

The Pu Luong – Cuc Phuong Conservation Project (see notes for Editors) is working to support the efforts of the Forest Protection Department and their locally based rangers, who at present lack the capacity to effectively protect all the sub-populations. The project also aims to raise local awareness of the species’ plight, as its survival will depend heavily on gaining the support of all local and national authorities as well as local communities.

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Notes for Editors

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- Delacour’s Langur, *Trachypithecus delacouri*, was first discovered in 1930 near Hoi Xuan commune, Quan Hoa district, north-west Thanh Hoa province, by J. Delacour and W. Lowe. The genus *Trachypithecus* is the most widespread genus of Asian langur and occurs from India to Vietnam to Sumatra. Six taxa belonging to the genus occur in Vietnam, two of which are endemic to the country, Delacour’s Langur *T. delacouri* and Cat Ba Langur *T. poliocephalus*.
- Delacour’s Langur is distinguished from all other Asian langurs by its white cheek bands, its thickly furred tail, and the white body colouration extending from the lower

back to just above the knees which gives the langur the appearance of wearing a pair of white shorts. Its common name in Vietnamese ‘*Vooc Mong Trang*’ is based on this appearance (‘the langur with white rump’).

- Delacour’s Langur is found only in the Pu Luong – Cuc Phuong limestone range (PL-CP). The PL-CP limestone range is located in north-central Vietnam and encompasses the border areas shared by the Thanh Hoa, Hoa Binh and Ninh Binh provinces. The limestone range is characterised by extensive limestone karst areas, and contains one of the largest remaining areas of lowland limestone forest in northern Vietnam. The limestone karst itself comprises a plateau formed by Cuc Phuong (National Park) in the east and two ridges running north-west to south-east that taper towards one another before meeting at the western end of Pu Luong Nature Reserve in north-west Thanh Hoa. A smaller limestone ridge does extend further westwards of the main limestone landscape to a large area of limestone massif north of Son La province. There is no evidence that Delacour’s Langur occurs in this latter area.

- The most recent status review of Delacour’s Langur suggests that 19 subpopulations, comprising 49-53 groups and 270-302 animals of the species remain in the wild. Figures of animals known to have been hunted (which are doubtlessly incomplete), alone indicate that populations of Delacour’s Langur may have declined by 50-55% over the last ten years. As a result, Delacour’s Langur qualifies as ‘Critically Endangered’ (CR A2cd+3cd; C2a (i)), according to latest ‘Red List’ criteria laid down by the World Conservation Union (IUCN). This also means that a further population decline of $\geq 80\%$ is predicted to occur within the next ten years, due either to a decline in range, available habitat, or as a result of exploitation, or both. As such, Delacour’s Langur is among the world’s top 25 most endangered primates.

- Isolation of remaining populations and intense hunting pressure pose the most severe short-term threat to the survival of the species in the wild. 60% of all known Delacour’s Langur occur in isolated sub-populations, with a maximum of 20 animals per sub-population. Such small populations are extremely sensitive and vulnerable. Without strict management and protection, their loss, and subsequently the loss of 60% of the known population, is foreseeable. The long term existence of these populations is also doubtful for genetic reasons. A further 55% of the known population is also considered particularly vulnerable to hunting pressure.

- Only two solitary sub-populations comprising 30-35 animals, the necessary to survive, are currently known. These exist in Van Long Provincial Nature Reserves, which is located in Gia Vien district in Ninh Binh Province, and, Pu Luong Provincial Nature Reserve, the site of the most recent sightings in the wild, which is located in the Quan Hoa and Ba Thuoc districts of north-west Thanh Hoa province.

- The current status of Delacour’s Langur on the ground and alarming levels of hunting within the PL-CP range indicate that the species stands on the brink of global extinction. To address this situation, a variety of measures are urgently required. Effective measures to control rampant wildlife trade and use of firearms are crucial to success of all efforts to

conserve the species. Education campaigns are required to generate awareness of the species plight and motivation towards its protection among local authorities and communities within the limestone range. Stricter enforcement of anti-hunting and forest protection laws and subsequent prosecution of offenders also represent a necessity. However, as protection of all subpopulations exceeds the capacity of forest protection departments and ranger stations at present, efforts to conserve the species will depend heavily on strong support from other local authorities.

- The most recent sightings of Delacour's Langur were obtained in biological surveys carried out under the auspices of the Pu Luong – Cuc Phuong Limestone Landscape Conservation Project in collaboration with the Endangered Primate Rescue Center, of the Frankfurt Zoological Society. The Pu Luong – Cuc Phuong (PL-CP) Limestone Landscape Conservation Project is managed by the Fauna and Flora International - Vietnam Programme and the Forest Protection Department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Vietnam. The project is funded by the Global Environment Facility of the World Bank and the Spanish Agency for International Co-operation, through Fundeso. Its aim is promote protection of the Pu Luong-Cuc Phuong limestone range and its wildlife by strengthening management of the existing protected area system and supporting sustainable development initiatives within local communities.
- Fauna & Flora International (FFI), the world's longest established international conservation body, works to conserve threatened species and ecosystems worldwide, choosing solutions that are sustainable, are based on sound science and take account of human needs. FFI works with in-country organizations at all levels to support them in identifying and implementing country-led sustainable solutions.
- The Endangered Primate Rescue Center (EPRC) at Cuc Phuong National Park was founded in 1993 as a follow on initiative to the Cuc Phuong National Park Conservation Programme, which was initially established at the site in 1991 with the support of the Frankfurt Zoological Society. The EPRC is dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation, breeding, research and conservation of the endangered primates of Vietnam and also serves as an excellent place for people to learn about endangered primates, their life, their habitats and the need to protect them for the future. Among other supporters, the EPRC enjoys support from the Frankfurt Zoological Society, which currently supervises more than 80 conservation interventions in 30 countries worldwide.

References

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