

**REPORT OF THE 2ND ASSOCIATION OF INDIAN PRIMATOLOGISTS CONFERENCE
(2024) IN ASSOCIATION WITH DOS IN PSYCHOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF MYSORE,
MYSURU**



The conference was hosted by the Department of Psychology, University of Mysore in Mysuru, Karnataka, from 9th to 11th February 2024. This was possible with the effort of core committee members and our valuable volunteers, who worked for months to organize the event efficiently, guided by the advisory committee of AIP (Association of Indian Primatologists). How it was organized, supporters, and funds were received from three major agencies: the IUCN section on small apes, Primate Conservation Inc., and Aaranyak. The aim of the conference was to encourage networking and knowledge exchange between Indian researchers working, as well as with stakeholders and conservation agencies working for the conservation of Indian Primates. To address all areas of specialization within primatology, we divided the sessions into 5 sub-themes: Conservation and outreach, Evolution, Ecology, Behavior, and Human-primate interactions.

The conference attracted an impressive turnout of over 80 attendees, showcasing a highly engaged and diverse audience. Among them, approximately 70 were presenters, reflecting a robust level of participation and a wide array of expertise shared through talks, panels, and poster presentations. The first day of the symposium was a grand opening, setting the tone for an engaging and intellectually enriching experience. Attendees from across the globe, including researchers, academics, and conservationists, gathered to delve into primate ecology, genetics, and conservation. The day offered a harmonious blend of keynote addresses, plenary talks, research presentations, and interactive sessions. Each event emphasized the importance of collaborative efforts in primate research and conservation, honoring the legacy of esteemed scholars in the field.

Day 1 (Friday, February 9, 2024)

“A Journey into Indian Primatology and Conservation”

The inaugural day of the conference set the stage for a deep exploration of primate ecology, genetics, and conservation, while paying homage to the luminaries who have shaped the field of Indian primatology. It was a day marked by intellectual vigor, heartfelt tributes, and engaging discussions on the multifaceted challenges and opportunities in primate research and conservation.

Opening and Tributes

The conference commenced with warm welcome addresses by Dr. Arijit Pal, the Chairman of the Department of Studies in Psychology Prof. Sampathkumar, and the Vice Chancellor of the University of Mysore, Prof. N. K. Lokanath. Their speeches highlighted the importance of interdisciplinary approaches to understanding primates and the role of this conference in fostering collaborative efforts across the scientific community.



A poignant moment followed as Dr. Mewa Singh delivered the **Inaugural Talk** in memory of the late Professor Surendra Mal Mohnot, a towering figure in Indian primatology. Dr. Singh recounted Professor Mohnot’s groundbreaking contributions, from his pioneering research on Hanuman langurs near Jodhpur to his leadership in creating the School of Desert Sciences, which championed wildlife conservation and ecological stewardship in

Rajasthan. His legacy, marked by significant Indo-German and Indo-US scientific collaborations, has left an indelible mark on Indian science. The audience was reminded of his profound impact, not just as a scientist but also as a humanist who advocated for the rights of stone mine workers.



Plenary Talk: Conservation Stories of Endemic Species

Dr. Honnavalli N. Kumara's Plenary Talk transported the audience into the lush forests of southern India, where the lion-tailed macaque and Mysore gray slender loris persist amidst mounting challenges. Through riveting narratives, Dr. Kumara illustrated how ecological studies and population data have informed critical conservation strategies.

The lion-tailed macaque, with its unique habitat between the Sharavathi and Aghanashini rivers, faces relentless habitat conversion. Meanwhile, the slender loris, a nocturnal species with a highly fragmented range, survives in remnant forest patches at astonishing densities. These stories underscored the urgent need for habitat protection and inspired hope by showcasing how scientific research has led to the creation of new protected areas.

Session on "Ecology and Genetics"

The first session of the day brought forward a series of thought-provoking research presentations, each shedding light on the intricate tapestry of primate ecology and genetics:

- ◆ Rumana Maheen shared an integrative study of macaque presence in Tezu, Arunachal Pradesh, unveiling new insights into their distribution in the region.



- Ekadh Ranganathan challenged existing paradigms of primate phylogeny by discussing mitochondrial-nuclear discordance and its implications for understanding species relationships.
- Santanu Mahato delved into the complex dynamics of mixed-species associations between Nilgiri and Hanuman langurs in the fragmented landscapes of the Western Ghats.



- Titir Debnath offered a fascinating look at the behavioral ecology and human interactions of mountain primates in Arunachal Pradesh.



Each presentation sparked discussions on innovative methodologies, conservation implications, and the need for collaborative research to address knowledge gaps.



Keynote and Panel Discussion: Human-Primate Interface

Dr. Praveen Karanth's invited talk on the human-mediated translocation of macaques and the potential spread of malarial parasites brought a critical One Health perspective to the conference. By emphasizing the interconnectedness of human and primate health, his talk highlighted the broader ecological consequences of such translocations.

Panel Discussion 1 featured a dynamic exchange between experts, including Dr. Mewa Singh, Dr.

Asmita Sengupta, and Mr. Manu, moderated by Mr. Mohan K. Topics ranged from managing human-primate conflict to fostering coexistence, offering practical insights and actionable solutions.



Interactive Sessions and Emerging Research

The latter part of the day featured a mix of Speed Talks and a Poster Session, providing a platform for emerging researchers to share their work. Highlights included:

- Ashika Dhimal's study on natural hybridization between golden and capped langurs in Bhutan.
- N. Arjunan's exploration of the foraging ecology of Nilgiri langurs in high-altitude habitats.
- Suraj Nagtilak's findings on mixed-species associations in the Western Ghats.
- An innovative table-top card game called Monkey Warfare by Shaurya Priyadarshi, designed to engage audiences on primate conservation themes.

The breakout sessions delved into critical issues in primatological research. Dr. Mehreen Khaleel and Dr. Sayantan Das explored the ethics of field studies, while Dr. Ajith Kumar and Ishika examined untested assumptions in primate conservation. These discussions emphasized the importance of reflexivity and rigor in scientific practice.



Reflections on Day 1

Day 1 of the conference set a high standard for the days to come. From paying homage to pioneers to discussing cutting-edge research and conservation challenges, the day reflected the vibrancy and depth of Indian primatology. The sessions highlighted not only the complexity of primate behavior and ecology but also the interconnectedness of human and non-human lives in a rapidly changing world.

The day closed with a renewed sense of purpose among attendees, as they looked forward to diving deeper into the themes of the conference in the days ahead.

Day 2 (Saturday, February 10, 2024)

The second day of the AIP 2nd Conference was intellectually stimulating and offered diverse insights into the fascinating world of primatology. It delved deep into gendered perspectives, behavioral studies, and conservation practices, creating an enriching dialogue among participants. The sessions were characterized by an interdisciplinary approach, combining ecology, sociology, and behavioral science to understand primates better and explore how these insights could inform broader conservation strategies.

Plenary Talk

Engendered Primatology: Of Female Primates and Feminist Primatologists
by Dr. Anindya Sinha



Dr. Sinha's plenary talk challenged traditional paradigms in biology and primatology by presenting a feminist lens on nonhuman primate societies. He highlighted the often-overlooked contributions of early female primatologists, drawing attention to how gender roles in both human and nonhuman societies are socially constructed and context-dependent.

His exploration of bonnet macaques, a female-bonded species, demonstrated how biological traits intertwine with sociocultural dynamics to shape gender identities in primate societies. By revisiting Antoinette Brown Blackwell's critique of Darwinism, Dr. Sinha emphasized the importance of feminist perspectives in advancing our understanding of gender dynamics across species. This thought-provoking talk resonated deeply, prompting the audience to reflect on the broader implications of gendered narratives in science and conservation.

Invited Talk

Behavioral Flexibility in Rhesus Macaques Across Space and Time
by Dr. Asmita Sengupta et al.



Dr. Sengupta's presentation showcased the remarkable adaptability of rhesus macaques in response to anthropogenic changes. By comparing groups exposed to varying degrees of human interference, she revealed how food availability, habitat types, and direct human interactions drive behavioral variability.

Her findings underscored the resilience of these primates but also highlighted the risks they face, such as roadkill, electrocution, and increased aggression within groups. Dr. Sengupta's emphasis on avoiding ecological interference provided a strong conservation message: to ensure the survival of adaptable species like rhesus macaques, humans must prioritize coexistence without overstepping natural boundaries.

Session on "Behavior"

The sessions that followed offered a rich tapestry of research showcasing the diverse behavioral adaptations of primates. Each presentation highlighted unique insights into primate ecology, communication, and interaction with human-altered landscapes:

- Accentuation of Hand Use Across Urban Gradients – Tejeshwar Dhananjaya discussed how urbanization influences hand-use patterns, revealing intriguing behavioral shifts in synanthropic primate groups.



- Time-Activity Budgets of Nilgiri Langurs – Sarmistha Ojha provided a detailed account of how these leaf-eating monkeys balance their daily activities, offering a window into their ecological adaptability in the Anamalai Tiger Reserve.
- Decoding Palates in Macaques – Vani Kulkarni's exploration of food recognition and preferences opened new avenues for understanding foraging behaviors and diet selection in macaques.



Other presentations delved into spatial usage, dominance structures, sensory experiences for environmental education, and gestural communication in urban environments. Collectively, these studies emphasized the nuanced interplay of ecological, demographic, and psychological factors in shaping primate behavior.

Afternoon Highlights

The afternoon sessions continued with innovative explorations:

- **Coconut Foraging and Productivity:** Sayantan Das presented a novel perspective on how long-tailed macaques' foraging behavior could potentially enhance coconut productivity, challenging the traditional view of these primates as pests.
- **Primate Decision-Making:** Virendra Mathur's integration of dual process and Bayesian decision theories provided a fresh lens to understand how primates navigate complex choices.
- **Crop Loss in Fragmented Forests:** Shridhar D. Bhat highlighted the comparative crop loss caused by bonnet macaques in different forest settings, adding valuable insights to human-wildlife conflict management.

The quiz session that followed offered a lighter yet intellectually engaging moment, fostering camaraderie among participants.

Conservation Panel and Speed Talks

The conservation panel, moderated by Dr. H. N. Kumara, brought together Mr. Balachandra Hegde, Mr. B.V. Gundappa, and Mr. S.G. Vinayaka to discuss strategies for demarcating protected areas for Indian primates. The dialogue emphasized the need for collaborative frameworks that

integrate scientific research, community involvement, and policy implementation.

The speed talks presented rapid but impactful snapshots of diverse research efforts, from primate-avian associations in Assam to human-lion-tailed macaque interactions in Kerala. The mapping of diseases like Kyasanur forest disease among monkey populations added a critical One Health perspective, highlighting the interconnectedness of primate health and human well-being.

Poster Session and Breakout Activities

The poster session offered a platform for participants to showcase their research in an interactive format. Discussions ranged from innovative methodologies to conservation challenges, fostering knowledge exchange and potential collaborations.



Parallel breakout sessions provided actionable outcomes:

1. Developing a standardized protocol for a pan-India primate population survey.
2. Addressing the ethical and logistical challenges of dealing with primate abuse.

These sessions underscored the conference's commitment to creating tangible conservation strategies, ensuring that academic discussions translate into real-world impact.

Reflections on Day 2

Day 2 of the conference was a testament to the interdisciplinary nature of primatology. The integration of feminist perspectives, behavioral ecology, and conservation strategies painted a holistic picture of primate research. The day's proceedings encouraged participants to rethink traditional narratives, explore innovative solutions, and embrace the complexities of coexistence in a rapidly changing world. As the conference progressed, it became evident that the future of primate research lies in bridging disciplinary divides, fostering collaboration, and ensuring that conservation efforts are inclusive and community-driven.

Day 3 (Sunday, February 11, 2024)

The final day of the symposium brought forth a deeper reflection on conservation strategies, challenges, and successes. With the sessions tightly packed with insightful discussions, presentations, and engaging debates, the day served as a culmination of the learnings from the event.

Session on “Conservation”

This session was an exploration of nuanced studies in primate conservation, each presentation adding a unique layer to the overarching theme.

- Canopy bridges will aid, railway realignment will cure - Rohit R. S. Jha shared an innovative study on the utility of canopy bridges and railway realignment to mitigate habitat fragmentation for western hoolock gibbons in Assam.



- Co-constructed lifeworlds: seemingly amicable human-gibbon relationships - Ishika Ramakrishna's research explored the complex interactions between humans and gibbons in Assam, offering an ethnographic perspective.



- How far has the loris leaped? A three-decade analysis - Aishwarya Kumar presented a comprehensive review of the conservation progress of lorises over three decades.



Invited Talk: Balancing Acts — Navigating Wildlife Conservation in Urban Spaces
by Mr. Karthick Prabu

Mr. Karthick Prabu, an urban ecologist and conservation strategist, provided an engaging perspective on the challenges and opportunities of conserving wildlife in urban areas. Using case studies from cities like Bengaluru and Chennai, he elaborated on habitat restoration, community-

based conservation, and the innovative use of green infrastructure. His talk emphasized the role of citizen science and grassroots advocacy in safeguarding biodiversity in the face of rapid urbanization.

Oral History

The oral history session added an emotional and reflective dimension to the symposium. Participants shared firsthand accounts of conservation battles, stories of perseverance, and lessons learned from both failures and successes. These narratives served as a poignant reminder of the human element in conservation work, underscoring the need for empathy and inclusivity in policy and practice.

Panel Discussion 2:

Who Should Take Precedence Over Agenda-Setting in Conservation Programs?



Panelists: Dr. H. N. Kumara, Dr. M. D. Madhusudan, Ms. Rishika Pardikar

Moderator: Dr. Sayantan Das

The panel delved into a contentious yet critical topic — who gets to set the agenda in conservation? The discussion addressed power dynamics between policymakers, scientists, and local communities. Dr. Madhusudan advocated for a bottom-up approach, emphasizing the role of indigenous communities in shaping conservation strategies. Ms. Pardikar highlighted the media's role in amplifying marginalized voices, while Dr. Kumara stressed the balance between scientific rigor and ground-level realities. The session fostered a lively exchange of ideas, leaving participants with a deeper appreciation of the complexities involved in agenda-setting.

Closing Ceremony and Feedback Session

The symposium concluded with a heartfelt closing ceremony, where organizers expressed gratitude to the participants, speakers, and volunteers. The feedback session provided an opportunity for attendees to share their experiences, suggestions, and takeaways, paving the way for an even more impactful event in the future.

Poster Presentations Highlights

While presented across the first two days, the poster sessions remained a key highlight of the symposium. Key contributions included:

- Chemical and amino acid profile of *Cullenia exarillata* flowers and seeds: Resource parts preferred by lion-tailed macaques by V. Monisha.
- Group foraging facilitates successful nest raiding of bonnet macaques evading the nest defense of large-billed crows by T. Nathan Parthasarathy.
- Investigating the interplay between tick abundance, prevalence, and Kyasanur forest disease in primate populations of Wayanad, Kerala by Stefina C. C.
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These presentations underscored the depth and breadth of research being undertaken in primate ecology and conservation.

Reflections and Impact

Day 3 encapsulated the essence of the symposium, bridging scientific research, policy, and on-ground realities. The sessions challenged attendees to rethink conventional approaches, embrace inclusivity, and adopt innovative strategies for conservation. The event concluded with a renewed commitment to protecting biodiversity, fostering coexistence, and advancing the discourse on conservation in India and beyond.

Major Highlights of the Second AIP Conference 2024: Advancements in Primatological Science and Future Directions

The Second Annual AIP Conference 2024 showcased significant progress in primatological science, emphasizing both cutting-edge research and actionable solutions for conservation challenges. The discussions underscored the importance of interdisciplinary approaches, collaboration, and innovation in advancing primate research and conservation. Below are the highlights in terms of scientific advancements and future roadmaps:

1. Advancements in Primatological Science

a) Behavioral Ecology and Social Dynamics

- Studies on lion-tailed macaques revealed nuanced insights into their spatial dynamics, emphasizing the importance of integrating movement patterns into home range analysis for effective conservation planning.
- Research on bonnet macaques' foraging behavior highlighted their remarkable adaptability and strategic group dynamics, offering clues for understanding primate intelligence and resource utilization.
- Observations on human-gibbon relationships in Assam revealed seemingly amicable cohabitation dynamics, challenging conventional notions of conflict and fostering new perspectives on coexistence.

b) Conservation Strategies and Habitat Restoration

- Canopy bridges and railway realignment for western hoolock gibbons demonstrated tangible solutions for mitigating habitat fragmentation, presenting a replicable model for infrastructure projects in biodiverse regions.
- A comprehensive analysis of loris conservation over three decades brought to light the successes and gaps in habitat protection, poaching control, and public awareness campaigns, providing a robust framework for targeted interventions.

c) Human-Primate Conflict and Disease Ecology

- An in-depth study of human-rhesus macaque conflict in Himachal Pradesh highlighted the complex socio-ecological factors driving conflict, offering insights into scalable, community-based mitigation measures.
- Research on tick prevalence and Kyasanur Forest Disease in primates in Wayanad identified critical links between disease ecology, habitat health, and primate populations, underscoring the need for integrated wildlife health monitoring systems.

d) Taxonomy and Conservation Genetics

- The discovery of new species in the genus *Trachypithecus* and their population decline underscored the need for robust taxonomic studies and species-specific conservation strategies.
- Genetic studies presented at the conference reinforced the importance of maintaining genetic diversity in fragmented primate populations for long-term viability.

2. Steps and Scopes for the Future

a) Establishing Conservation Priorities

Integrative Research Frameworks: Participants emphasized the need for interdisciplinary research that combines behavioral studies, ecological monitoring, and socio-economic assessments.

b) Enhancing Human-Wildlife Coexistence

- Developing community-based conflict mitigation frameworks, such as incentivizing coexistence through eco-tourism and sustainable livelihood programs.
- Scaling up proven solutions, like canopy bridges, across fragmented habitats to ensure safe passage for arboreal species.

c) Addressing Urban Conservation Challenges

- Expanding studies on urban wildlife conservation to include behavioral adaptations of primates in human-dominated landscapes.
- Encouraging urban planners to integrate biodiversity considerations into development projects, as highlighted in Mr. Karthick Prabu's talk.

d) Strengthening Disease Monitoring and Health Interventions

- Implementing One Health approaches to monitor zoonotic diseases in primates and their implications for human health.
- Establishing wildlife disease surveillance networks in biodiversity hotspots to mitigate future pandemics.

e) Promoting Public Engagement and Awareness

- Fostering citizen science initiatives to involve local communities and students in monitoring primate populations and reporting threats.
- Designing outreach programs that counter superstitions and negative perceptions about lesser-known primates, such as lorises.

f) Advancing Technological Interventions

- Leveraging advancements in remote sensing, AI, and camera trapping to monitor elusive primate species and assess habitat quality.
- Promoting the use of genomic tools to identify cryptic species and ensure effective conservation management.

3. Collaborative Roadmaps for the Future

a) Expanding Global and Regional Partnerships

- Facilitating cross-border collaborations to address transboundary conservation challenges, particularly in South Asia.
- Strengthening ties between academic institutions, NGOs, and government bodies for effective conservation interventions.

b) Building Capacity and Funding

- Training the next generation of primatologists and conservationists through workshops, fellowships, and hands-on field training.
- Advocating for increased funding for species-specific and habitat-focused conservation programs.

c) Integrating Conservation into Climate Resilience

- Highlighting the role of primates as ecosystem engineers and linking their conservation to broader climate resilience goals.
- Incorporating habitat restoration projects into national climate action plans.

Conclusion

The Second AIP Conference 2024 not only showcased groundbreaking research but also laid out a vision for the future of primate conservation. By integrating science, community engagement, and policy, the conference reaffirmed the importance of collective efforts in securing a sustainable future for primates and their habitats. It called upon all stakeholders to act decisively, leveraging knowledge and collaboration to address the multifaceted challenges of primate conservation in the 21st century.

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Photo courtesy - AIP