

Hostile habitat led to electrocution of Endangered Phayre's Leaf-Monkey at Assam University, Silchar

Primates are mostly arboreal animals that usually cruise the canopy in search of food and shelter. As per the IUCN Red List, Phayre's Leaf-Monkey *Trachypithecus phayrei* is a globally endangered primate; included under Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act 1972.

This species is fighting the last battle for its survival in the fragmented habitats in the backyard forest areas of Assam University, Silchar. Other than this remote forest of Barak Valley of Assam, a number of them are found in Tripura and Mizoram and nowhere else within the country (Choudhury 2001; Bose 2003; Borah 2010).

These primates commonly called Spectacled Monkeys forage mostly in the deep forest areas and their reclusive nature make them a lesser-known species. Locally, they are called 'Kala Hanuman' or 'Chasma Bandor'. Their population



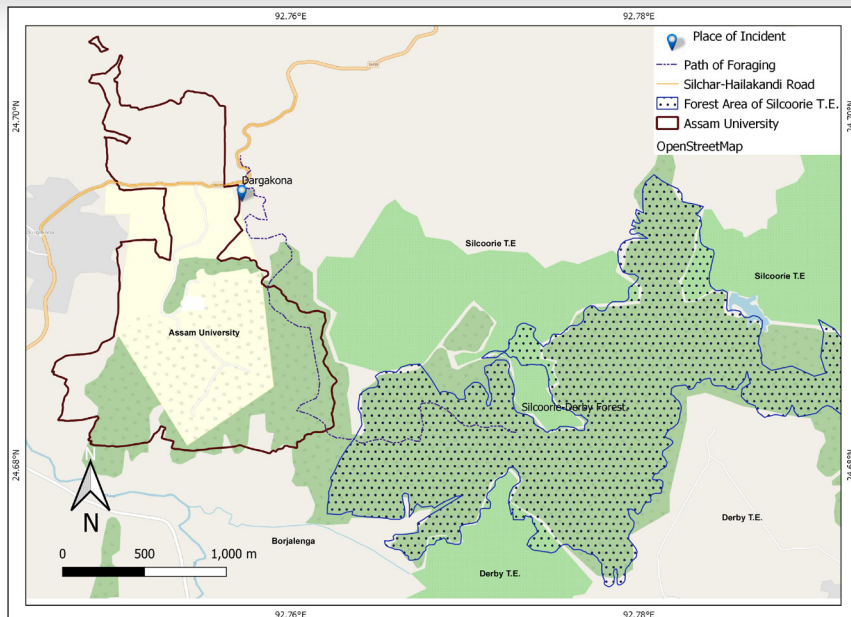
Phayre's Leaf Monkey after electrocution with both the forelimbs burned. © Biswajit Singh.



The dead animal being buried. © Biswajit Singh.

is fast declining across their habitat range in the country which demands the adoption of immediate steps for their conservation. During recent years, infrastructure

development related activities are on the rise in Assam University and its surrounding areas, as a result the habitat here is fast degrading and this degradation has led to



The place where the incident took place along with the path of foraging from the nearby forest to the human habitat that was fragmented by roads. The monkey got electrocuted as it crossed the road.

the split up of the surviving group into two or three smaller groups.

On the morning of 1 June 2021, a very sad and unfortunate incidence was noted when we got the news regarding the death of one Spectacled Monkey near the electric power grid of the Assam University campus.

The incidence as reported here took place when a small group of three individuals was trying to cross the road behind the university campus, and thus one got injured after coming in contact with low-lying high-tension wire of the electric substation and ultimately succumbed to

death. Earlier, the death of Phayre's Leaf-Monkey due to electrocution was also reported from Bangladesh (Al-Razi et al. 2019).

We measured the body weight of the dead individual (Table 1), but the weight was only 4.2 kg with respect to the mean weight of adult male individuals (i.e., 7.3 kg) (Fleagle 1988). The small troop came from the forested areas of the adjoining Silcoorie Tea Estate. It needs mentioning here that the small troop was separated from the parent troop of 17 individuals and the causes of fragmentation were narrated in our earlier study (Singh & Choudhury 2020).

The habitat here is no longer safe for the primates. These low-lying electric lines pose a threat to the species fighting for survival. Over time, habitat destruction has directed them to move towards human settlement areas, which once were the exclusive habitat for primates and other wildlife (Mazumdar & Dey 2010). This had been the first incidence when the monkey troop was trying to reach an area that is close to human habitats. The reason can be attributed to the anthropogenic pressure on the forest area (Dattagupta et al. 2014) of Silcoorie Tea Estate (Dargakona Sub-division) that triggered them to move out of their habitat.

In earlier studies (Singh & Choudhury 2020) it was highlighted that the Silcoorie Tea Estate located adjacent to the Assam University, Silchar, and in the last leg of Inner Line Reserve Forest (Assam) has good forest patches that harbour eight species of primates, Wild Boar, Barking Deer, Chinese Pangolin, Porcupine, Civets, Jungle Cat and many species of birds, reptiles, and amphibians (Dutta et al. 1998; Mazumdar et al. 2011; Islam et al. 2014).

Table 1. Body-weight measurements of the dead individual species.

Species	Phayre's Leaf-monkey <i>Trachypithecus phayrei</i>
Sex	Male
Body Measurements	
Head-body length (cm)	50.5
Tail length (cm)	72.3
Hindlimb length (cm)	51.5
Hindfoot length (cm)	15.5
Forelimb length (cm)	41.1
Forefoot length (cm)	14.8
Upper canine length (cm)	1.15
Lower canine length (cm)	0.89
Weight (kg)	4.2

It is thus recommended that the forest area adjoining the university and the surplus land areas of tea estate may be converted to a community conservation area to protect the variety of threatened species that thrive herein. Such steps, if taken up would enable the animals to forage well within their habitat and might not come close to the human habitations from the forest areas. Since the university is having a good forest patch which is a foraging area of many a species, it is recommended that the high voltage electric wires be insulated to avert such incidences in the future.

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