

CRAB-EATING MACAQUE AND ITS FUTURE IN BANGLADESH

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A small population of crab-eating macaque was located in the Whykheong region of the Cox's Bazar Forest Division. The population is greatly threatened due to rapid expansion of shrimp cultivation in the area. The population status, food habit and distribution so far studied are presented in this paper. The possibilities of rehabilitating this species in other areas of Bangladesh have also been discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The Crab-eating Macaque, *Macaca fascicularis* Raffles is found in the coastal, rural and urban regions as well as in the virgin forests of many South-East Asian countries like Burma, Philippines, Thailand, Malaya, Vietnam, Sumatra, Java and Borneo (Fooden 1969a). It was also introduced into Mauritius (Napier and Napier 1967).

The population of this species throughout the entire range is declining and in some regions is very much threatened. Rabor (1965) reported that the population of Crab-eating Macaque had declined greatly in the Philippines. Southwick and Cadigan (1972) also reported very small population in Malaya. In Bangladesh too the population of this species has declined to a great extent.

REPORTS OF CRAB-EATING MACAQUE FROM BANGLADESH

The existence of this species in Bangladesh was not known even a few years back. Rashid (1977) first reported about this species and mentioned that they were available in Chittagong Hill Tracts and in the mangrove forests of Chokoria-Sunderbans under Cox's Bazar Forest Division. Subsequently, the existence of this species were also reported by Khan (1981), Khan and Ahsan (1981), Siddiqi and Faizuddin (1981). Khan (1982) also reported that this species was found near Teknaf township about a decade back. This macaque is now restricted to the Coastal forests of Whykheong under Cox's Bazar Forest Division.

Food Habit : Crab-eating macaque is a misnomer as this species does not live only on crabs. It is reported to be an omnivorous animal and lives on crustaceans, mollusks, insects and subsisting mainly on vegetable matter (Fooden 1969a, Roonwal and Mohnot 1977). Davis (1962) reported that this species also feeds on rice, potatoes, crabs and prawns. The authors observed crabs, prawns, fishes and tender fruits of kankra (*Bruguiera conjugata*) as its food materials. The local people of Whykheong area reported that the macaques stole cooked rice from their kitchens. Interestingly, Kurland (1973) reported that crab-eating macaque never drank water.

Habitat and Present Status : From reports it appears that this species can survive under wide ecological variations. Roonwal and Mohnot (1977) reported that this species was found in the virgin forests of Malaysia and Indonesia upto an elevation of 2000 m. In Malaysia they were reported seen in rural as well as in urban areas (Furuya 1962b, Furuya 1965 ; Medway 1969, Midway 1970b ; Fooden 1971a ; Southwick and Cadigan (1972). In Bangladesh they are surviving somehow in a very small coastal area under Cox's Bazar Forest Division.

Two visits, in March and May 1984 were made in Whykheong region to study the distribution and population status of the species. The existence of six troops were found in four localities. The average troop size was found to be 11.2 ± 6.5 in the localities of Noapara, *Belaichodia*, Roikomodia and Bermidia in March. However, during the second visit in May 1984 no Crab-eating

monkey was found in Noapara, rather one troop was found in Pyrimidia. In May the average troop size was 9.4 ± 4.3 . There were altogether five troops in this area. The population structure and male to female ratio are presented in Table 1. The total population had declined from 67 to 47 during the lapse of two months.

Causes of Decline : Shrimp cultivation in all the coastal areas of the country is expanding rapidly. In 1979 khas (unallotted Govt. land) coastal area comprising of 4750 acres of land at Rampur, Chokoria, Sunderbans in the Cox's Bazar area have been leased out for shrimp cultivations for a period of five years at the rate of Tk. 100.00/acre/yr. Again, 670 acres of land under Nhila Range, very near to Teknaf have been encroached and converted into shrimp cultivation farms (source : Forest Deptt.). These were the ideal habitats of the crab-eating macaque and are fast converted into the shrimp cultivation zone. Two troops at Noapara were noticed in March 1984 but could not be found in May 1984 which probably had migrated to Pyrimidia as noticed in May, 1984. These are the areas very much adjacent to Burma. Thus the macaque population of Bangladesh which are confined to Whykheong region only is greatly threatened. It is apprehended that the species may migrate to Burma which is on the other side of the river. The reasons for the migration are :

1. Rapid destruction of vegetation for shrimp cultivation. Noapara is already cleared off of vegetation. Vegetation of other localities may also be completely destroyed for shrimp cultivation.

Table 1. Distribution and population status of crab-eating macaque, *Macaca fascicularis* in Bangladesh

Date of observation	Locality	Troop No.	Troop size	Population Structure		
				Adult (M)	Adult (F)	Juvenile
13-3-1984	Noapara	1	10	2	4	4
13-3-1984	Noapara	2	5	1	2	2
14-3-1984	Belaichodia	1	10	2	5	3
14-3-1984	Belaichodia	2	22	3	11	8
14-3-1984	Roikomodia	1	15	4	6	5
14-3-1984	Bermidia	1	5	1	2	2
			67	13	30	24
			11.2±6.5	2.2±1.2	3.8±1.8	4±2.3
23-5-1984	Belaichodia	1	4	1	2	1
23-5-1984	Belaichodia	2	9	2	4	3
24-5-1984	Pyrimidia	1	16	3	7	6
24-5-1984	Roikomodia	1	10	2	4	3
25-5-1984	Bermidia	1	8	2	3	3
			47	11	20	16
			9.4±4.3	2.2±0.8	4±1.9	3.2±1.8

2. Constant disturbance caused by the people engaged in shrimp cultivation over the entire area and compelling them to go to the Burmese coastal side.
3. Trapping and selling by the local people, and
4. Killing the macaque by the local tribal people for their food.

Steps taken for Preservation : The Forest Department had released six crab-eating macaques in Jallardwip near Teknaf on the 19th November, 1983. The population, composed of one adult male, one adult female (pregnant) and four juveniles, were captured from Whykheong area.

CONCLUSIONS

From the study it is clear that the primate species has been greatly threatened

in Bangladesh for shrimp cultivation. It is encouraging to note that the Forest Department has been paying attention for its preservation and conservation, but the steps, so far taken are not sufficient for their survival. Constant observations are essential to note their movement and activities in the places where they have been released.

The crab eating macaques are also capable of living anywhere because of their diversified food habit and adaptability to diversified habitat. Attempt may be taken up without delay to rehabilitate this species in other areas for their survival. Protection measures should simultaneously be taken to save this species from extinction in Bangladesh.

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