

Assamese macaque

Northeast India is a biodiversity hotspot, with a diverse array of animal species residing in its lush forests and grasslands. The region is home to several charismatic megafauna, including the one-horned Indian rhinoceros, Asian elephant, and Bengal tiger. Apart from these, the region also has numerous species of primates, such as the Hoolock gibbon and Assamese macaque, along with several species of deer, wild boar, and other herbivores. The Brahmaputra River and its tributaries support several species of river dolphins and otters, while the forests harbor several species of birds, reptiles, and amphibians, some of which are found nowhere else in the world. However, habitat destruction, poaching, and human-wildlife conflicts are some of the major threats to the biodiversity of Northeast India.

Primate Biodiversity of North East India

Northeast India is a region of rich primate biodiversity, with several species of primates found in its lush forests. The Hoolock gibbon, a charismatic and endangered primate species, is found in the forests of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, and Manipur. Another species of gibbon, the eastern black crested gibbon, is found in the forests of Nagaland and Mizoram. The region also has several species of macaques, including the Assamese macaque, capped langur, and northern pig-tailed macaque. The western hoolock gibbon, the only ape species found in India, is also found in the forests of Arunachal Pradesh. The forests of the region also harbor several species of lorises, including the Bengal slow loris and pygmy slow loris. However, habitat loss and fragmentation, hunting for bushmeat, and pet trade are major threats to the primate populations of Northeast India. Conservation efforts, such as

protected areas and community-based conservation programs, are crucial to ensure the survival of these primates and their habitats.

Assamese macaque

| SL NO | Characteristics | Assamese Macaque |
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| 1 | Common Name | Assamese Macaque |
| 2 | Scientific Name | Macaca assamensis |
| 3 | Length | 40-70 cm |
| 4 | Colour | Greyish-brown with black face |
| 5 | Height/girth | 50-60 cm (average) |
| 6 | Tail length | 20-30 cm |
| 7 | Height till shoulder | 40-60 cm |
| 8 | Average weight | 5-10 kg |
| 9 | Food habits | Omnivorous – fruits, seeds, insects, small animals |
| 10 | Habitat | Tropical and subtropical forests in Assam and neighbouring regions in India |
| 11 | Interesting facts | Assamese Macaques have a unique behaviour of using tools – they use stones to crack open hard nuts and shells. They also have a strict dominance hierarchy within their social groups and communicate with various vocalizations and body language. They are considered a threatened species due to habitat loss and hunting for their meat and body parts in some regions. |

Features

The Assamese macaque, also known as the Himalayan macaque or the Tibetan macaque, is a species of Old World monkey found in the northeastern regions of India, Bhutan, and parts of China.

The males and females of the species have different physical characteristics. Adult males can be distinguished by their larger size, which ranges from 50-65 cm (20-26 inches) in body length and weighs between 7-14 kg (15-31 pounds). In contrast, females are smaller, measuring 45-60 cm (18-24 inches) in body length and weighing between 5-9 kg (11-20 pounds).

Both male and female Assamese macaques have a dark brown or black coat, with a lighter-colored face and underside. They have short, slender tails that measure between 12-20 cm (5-8 inches) in length.

One of the unique features of the Assamese macaque is their bare, pinkish-red face with prominent whiskers. They also have a prominent crest of fur on their heads, which is more pronounced in males.

Assamese macaques are known for their high levels of social intelligence and complex social behaviors. They live in multi-level societies, with females forming the core of social groups and males leaving their natal groups to join others. Within social groups, they exhibit a complex hierarchy, with dominant individuals having priority access to resources and mating opportunities.

Another notable characteristic of Assamese macaques is their ability to use tools, such as stones to crack open hard-shelled nuts. They have also been observed using sticks to probe for insects and other small prey.

Food Habits

Assamese macaques are omnivorous and their diet consists of a variety of foods including fruits, leaves, flowers, seeds, insects, small animals, and occasionally bird eggs. They are known to be opportunistic feeders and will consume whatever is available in their habitat.

Habitats

The Assamese macaque is found primarily in the northeastern regions of India, particularly in the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, and Nagaland. They are also found in neighbouring countries such as Bhutan, China, and Myanmar.

In India, the Assamese macaque is found in a variety of habitats, including tropical and subtropical forests, evergreen forests, montane forests, and grasslands. They are adaptable and have also been found in human-modified landscapes such as agricultural fields and urban areas.

Vulnerable Species

Assamese macaque (*Macaca assamensis*) is listed as near threatened on the IUCN Red List. Although the exact population size of the Assamese macaque is not known the population trend seems to be decreasing.

The main threats to the Indian markhor include habitat loss and degradation, hunting, and competition with domestic livestock for resources. The expansion of human settlements and agriculture into the markhor's natural habitat has led to a loss of suitable feeding and breeding grounds. Hunting for meat, trophies, and traditional medicine also remains a significant threat, despite being illegal under Indian law.

Conservation efforts to protect the Indian markhor include habitat restoration, anti-poaching patrols, and community education programs. In 2014, the Wildlife Trust of India launched a project aimed at conserving the markhor population in the Kargil region. The project involves working with local communities to raise awareness about the importance of conserving the species and implementing measures to reduce human-wildlife conflicts.

Protected Areas

Assamese macaques are found primarily in the northeastern regions of India, particularly in the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, and Nagaland. There are several national parks and wildlife reserves in these states that offer habitats for this species.

Namdapha National Park, Arunachal Pradesh is located in the eastern Himalayas and is the largest protected area in the northeastern region of India. It is known for its rich biodiversity and is home to a variety of wildlife species, including Assamese macaques.

Kaziranga National Park, Assam, a UNESCO World Heritage Site is famous for its population of Indian one-horned rhinoceroses, but it is also home to a variety of other wildlife species, including Assamese macaques.

Manas National Park, Assam is located in the foothills of the Himalayas and is known for its population of Bengal tigers, as well as for its diverse range of flora and fauna, including Assamese macaques.

Nameri National Park is located on the border of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh and is known for its population of elephants, tigers, and other wildlife species, including Assamese macaques.

Dibru-Saikhowa National Park, Assam is located in the floodplains of the Brahmaputra River and is known for its diverse range of wildlife species, including Assamese macaques.

These national parks and wildlife reserves provide crucial habitats for Assamese macaques and are important sites for their conservation.