

Tonkin snub-nosed monkey

Rhinopithecus avunculus



Adult male Tonkin snub-nosed monkey © Le Khac Quyet



Tonkin snub-nosed monkeys typically live in large family groups consisting of one adult male, one or more adult females and their sub-adult offspring.

Adult male and female Tonkin snub-nosed monkeys are similar in appearance, although, reaching up to 20 kg the males can weigh twice as much as the females. In both sexes the fur on the back and outside of the limbs is dark brown to black, while fur on the inside of limbs, head and chest is white.

◆ Distribution

Historically the distribution of the Tonkin snub-nosed monkey extended east from the Red River. Today, as a result of habitat loss and hunting pressure, this species is found only in a few isolated locations in the extreme northeast of Vietnam. The largest of these populations consists of about 90 individuals in Khu Ca District, Ha Giang Province. A second population in Ha Giang consists of 30 – 40 animals in Quan Ba District. Other small populations survive in Than Sa Phu-ong Hoang Nature Reserve, Thai Nguyen Province and Na Hang Nature Reserve, Tuyen Quang Province.

◆ Habitat & Ecology

Tonkin snub-nosed monkeys inhabit tropical evergreen forest associated with limestone hills and mountains. The species lives at elevations ranging from 200 – 1,200 m.

The diet of the Tonkin snub-nosed monkey consists mainly of leaves and fruit.

◆ Fast facts

- Fewer than 200 Tonkin snub-nosed monkeys remain in the wild.
- Tonkin snub-nosed monkeys are found only in northern Vietnam.
- They were believed to be extinct until rediscovered in 1989.
- Tonkin snub-nosed monkeys are categorised as Critically Endangered.
- Tonkin snub-nosed monkeys are protected under CITES Appendix I and Group IB Decree 32/2006 of the Vietnamese law.

◆ Introduction

With a known population of fewer than 200 individuals, the Tonkin snub-nosed monkey *Rhinopithecus avunculus* is one of the rarest monkeys in the world. First discovered in 1911 the Tonkin snub-nosed monkey was thought to be extinct until a population was rediscovered in Na Hang District, Tuyen Quang Province, in 1989.

Tonkin snub-nosed monkeys are members of the family known as the Colobines, the leaf-eating monkeys. Within this family they belong to a group of species known as “odd-nosed monkeys” which also includes proboscis monkeys, pig-tailed langurs, doucs and other snub-nosed monkeys. Representatives of this group have a large multi-chambered stomach, which is specifically adapted to digest large amounts of leaf matter, which makes up the main part of their diet together with unripe fruit and seeds.

There are only five species of snub-nosed monkeys in the world. Only one of the species, the Tonkin snub-nosed monkey, occurs in Vietnam, in the far north of the country. Three species are found in China and a new species, the Myanmar snub-nosed monkey, was discovered only in 2011 by Fauna & Flora International (FFI).



Distribution of Tonkin snub-nosed monkeys (IUCN 2012)



Tonkin snub-nosed monkeys © Le Khac Quyet

◆ Threats

Tonkin snub-nosed monkeys are threatened with extinction due to habitat disturbance and hunting pressure. Over the past hundred years the habitat of monkey has been severely reduced and now only small isolated fragments remain. The remaining habitat continues to be cleared for rice cultivation or degraded, for example for the cultivation of cardamom and a medicinal plant known as *Lysimachia*, on which the local communities are strongly dependent.

Although the species is not usually specifically targeted by hunters, Tonkin snub-nosed monkeys are shot opportunistically when encountered by people in the forest. As with most primate species in Vietnam the bones of the Tonkin snub-nosed monkey are valued on the traditional Asian medicine market.

More recently, the development of a hydroelectric power project on the Gam River in Na Hang resulted in large tracts of Tonkin snub-nosed monkey habitat being cleared and the influx of workers led to increased demand for wildlife meat.

Furthermore, as with any species whose population size and habitat have been severely reduced, the Tonkin snub-nosed monkey is susceptible to even low levels of hunting pressure and will remain vulnerable extinction due to natural or man-made disasters such as disease outbreak, forest fire or climate change.

◆ Conservation

The Tonkin snub-nosed monkey is listed in Group IB of Prime Minister's Decree 32/2006, which prohibits all hunting or trade in rare and precious wildlife. The species is offered international protection under CITES Appendix I, which prohibits all commercial trade in the species.

Ever since the species was rediscovered, FFI has been leading efforts to conserve the Tonkin snub-nosed monkey, supporting protection of the monkeys and their habitat, conducting ecological research and discovering previously unknown populations in Ha Giang Province.

Following the discovery of populations in Quan Ba and Khau Ca districts in Ha Giang Province the immediate response of FFI was to increase protection of the monkeys and their habitat through the establishment of community-based patrol groups, which continue operating today.

In 2009 FFI supported the Forest Protection Department in establishing the Tonkin snub-nosed monkey Species and Habitat Conservation Area in Khau Ca District.

Local communities are at the core of FFI's primate conservation work in Vietnam. FFI engages with local communities to raise awareness on, and pride in, the Tonkin snub-nosed monkeys. FFI has worked with communities surrounding the monkeys' habitat to develop a Species Conservation Action Plan that takes into account the ecological needs of the monkeys and the economic needs of the people. FFI is also pioneering the establishment of Management Advisory Committees in Vietnam to enable people living closest to the forest to play a role in its management.



Environmental education programme led by FFI

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