

Primate behaviour and conservation: The urban impact

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During the past two decades or so, there has been a lot of talk about a new discipline called Urban Ecology. Two new journals totally dedicated to this area and several books with the titles Urban Ecology have been published. Actually, the origin of this area of research can be traced to Prof. S.D. Singh of Panjab University Chandigarh who published many articles on urban monkeys in the 1960s, and he was solicited by the Scientific American to contribute an article on the topic. His Scientific American paper titled Urban Monkeys set the stage for the so-called urban ecology research field. I will report our research on monkeys to show how living in urban environments, where the monkeys are exposed to food resources that are largely encased or hidden, has led to the emergence of complex skills for food extraction and food processing. Such skills are not observed in their forest counterparts. I will also discuss the wildlife conservation management strategies in the Indian context, once again taking examples of forest-dwelling and largely commensal primates. The lion-tailed macaque of the Western Ghats is a typical habitat specialist of the rainforest which is a relatively stable habitat. However habitat fragmentation is the major threat to its survival. On the other hand, the bonnet macaque is largely commensal sharing habitat and sometimes resources with people often resulting in conflict. Although the bonnet macaque is adapted to a wide variety of habitat types, most of these habitats are unstable. Large populations of this species, therefore, have disappeared over the last few decades. By taking the examples of these two macaque species, I will discuss how different types of wildlife conservation and management plans are needed in India.