

Continuing assessment of the conservation status of Sri Lanka's Wet Zone primates, with a focus on the critically endangered purple-faced leaf monkey

The chance for research in Sri Lanka on the purple-faced leaf monkey, made possible by URSS, has been, and continues to be a great opportunity for me to increase my experience and knowledge within a field I possess a large amount of interest. At present, this Critically Endangered species has only a paucity of information regarding its ecology, behaviour, range size and habitat use, together with many other aspects of its highly fragmented and disturbed forest home. During my research period I was able to collect a large amount of information within these relatively unexplored domains, and am presently analysing these data in order to assess, and consequently, provide a more detailed and up-to-date account into the lives of this species. My hope is that this information can then be used for conservation purposes, and ultimately help this magnificent primate species, which I have now seen first hand, from becoming extinct.

Reflections including skills and transferable skills

My research project started along before I left for the field. As part of the URSS funding I was able to work on, and become part of a team working on a long-term data set, which was previously collected from my chosen habitat country. These data, which I entered and analysed last semester for Dr Nekaris, concerned another sub-species of purple-faced leaf monkey, and provided me with invaluable prior experience into my own research methods and techniques. In addition the data were later presented as a poster at the European Federation of Primatology, in Prague, in September 2007. This gave me co-authorship on a published abstract in the meeting's proceedings, and as well as on one to come in *Folia Primatologica*.

Another outcome regarding these data that are currently in preparation is that the resulting paper will be submitted to a high quality ecological journal. This again means I will be one of the co-authors. The title will be "Hierarchical nested analysis of mammal abundance in Sri Lanka: impact of habitat quality and anthropogenic disturbance" and is going to be submitted to one of the following journals: *Journal of Applied Ecology*, *Biological Journal of the Linnean Society*, *Conservation Biology*.

The data on home range and habitat use that I collected myself are also due to be submitted to the *Journal of Zoology* once my analysis and dissertation are complete. I think this will be excellent for raising awareness of the problems this species is currently facing. These same data are intended to be presented at the International Primatological meetings in 2008 in Edinburgh.

Whilst in the field, I also took numerous photos of these Critically Endangered primates, and will attempt to publish them in an upcoming primate compendium by Ian Redmond, as well as the classic mammalian encyclopaedia, Grzimek's *Saugtierleben*.

Being able to take part in such a scheme has undoubtedly increased my preparation for future employment of post-graduate research. Throughout my research

programme I have learned new skills and undertaken a multitude of tasks that are vital to researchers' work. These include many computer-based programmes such as: SPSS, Arc GIS, Idrisi and Ranges 7.0.

The GIS based programmes allowed me to gain a better understanding into the work my father presently undertakes in his geographical field. (I was also glad of the occasional friendly guidance from his direction). Methods of collecting and analysing data were also learned and put into practice. These include: botanical indices (involving much statistical analysis), behavioural observation skills, sound recording techniques and the using a GPS device and laser range finder. In addition, working along side an MSc student whilst in the field aided the quick learning of these practices. Close work, and much guidance from, the philanthropical sector of Jetwing Ecotours, in Sri Lanka, provided good experience in order to know how to work with NGOs in the future (or similar organisations). Following my return, I also spent some time in the Buckley Building lab on campus, allowing me to mix with other researchers and see first-hand the day-to-day goings-on of MSc life at Brookes.

Other skills and experiences perhaps not directly linked to primatology, but still of some value, were basic Sinhala language skills which I learned for a brief period before, and throughout my research and the understanding of new and ostensibly different cultural practices. Whilst in the field I was able to make some very good friends within the local village, who often took me into their houses and generously fed me home-cooked meals, and whilst talking with them, provided me with great insight into the lives of typical Sri Lankans.