

Survival of Great Pied Hornbills in Arunachal Pradesh

In Arunachal Pradesh, the hornbill species are facing extinction due to traditional killing by the local communities. A total of five species occur in the state: Oriental Pied Hornbill (*Anthracoceros albirostris*), Great Pied Hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*), Wreathed Hornbill (*Rhyticeros undulatus*), Rufous Hornbill (*Aceros nepalensis*) and Brown Hornbill (*Ptilolaemus tickeli*). The Great Pied Hornbill is the largest among the nine species of hornbill distributed in the Indian sub-continent¹. Large-bodied fruiting birds are thought to be vulnerable to extinction due to the deforestation². Deforestation and loss of habitat are raising questions about the survival of hornbills in Arunachal Pradesh. In India isolated populations of hornbill are found in the Western Ghats, from Koloba to Tenmalai; also along the base of the Himalayas, from

Uttar Pradesh to Assam; southern Nepal; northern Bangladesh; China: Yunnan, western Yingjiang and southern Xishu-anbganna; Burma; Vietnam; Laos; Cambodia; Thailand; Peninsular Malaysia: south to Bukit Fraser in Pahang, Combak valley and Genting Simpah and several western offshore islands; Indonesia; isolated populations are found in Sumatra.

Most of the hornbills are threatened and vulnerable to varying degrees^{3,4}. The Great Pied Hornbill is listed as Near threatened (NT) by IUCN and Schedule I under the Indian Wildlife Protection Act 1972. Competition for nest cavities, and natural and human activities also affect breeding⁵. As the abundance of the Great Pied Hornbill is correlated with unlogged primary forest³ and with food-tree species abundance, habitat alteration makes this species more vulnerable⁶.

The Great Pied Hornbill has been facing severe threats due to bushmeat hunting. The Great Pied Horn bill casque is used as a head cover by the Nyishi tribe. A single casque costs around Rs 6000 in the local market. Apart from hunting, starvation also causes mortality among the young.

This monogamous bird species number is also decreasing due to logging, shifting cultivation (Jhum) and encroachment of forests, causing considerable threats to the hornbill and other species^{3,4}.

Though NGOs like Nature Conservation Foundation and Wildlife Trust of India are trying to create awareness among the local people, poaching and traditional killing are of immense concern for the survival of hornbills in Arunachal Pradesh.



Figure 1. Great Pied Hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*).

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