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UW researcher tracks black macaques, says population has stabilized

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Black macaques -

The Sulawesi Black Macaque population has declined at the Tangkoko National Reserve since 1997 but has recently shown signs of stabilization.

Photo by [Randall Kyes](#) / Courtesy photo



Randall Kyes

February 7, 2013 at 10:14 PM | [Karina Mazhukhina](#)

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One UW professor's research shows population numbers of an endangered primate are more promising than in previous years, but still need to be watched closely.

Randall Kyes, a UW psychology professor, has been studying the Sulawesi black macaque population since 1997 and has tracked its considerable decline at the Tangkoko Nature Reserve in North Sulawesi, Indonesia. His research shows the macaque population has stabilized in recent years, and even had a slight resurgence after years of decline. The findings of his research were published in the *American Journal of Primatology*.

"It is important that people understand that this stabilization does not mean we are seeing a dramatic increase in numbers; it means that something may be affecting to reduce the progressive decline," Kyes said. "Although these animals are still in the balance, they could easily tip over and continue declining. It is something that we need to maintain and focus on to make sure they continue to survive."

Kyes and his Indonesian colleagues began the population survey in 1999 with funding from the Woodland Park Zoo. They collected data through 2011.

"The agreement is designed, among other things, to promote the zoo's interest in conservation biology and conservation biology programs at the University and abroad," said Lisa Dabek, director of conservation at the Woodland Park Zoo.

For two-to-three-week survey periods, researchers took two daily accounts of the number of macaques they saw. They took a sampling of the macaques in the core of the reserve where the population was the healthiest. Using standardized methods, Kyes monitored the macaques every year at the same time during a field course. Kyes found that the macaque population per square kilometer increased from 3.6 in 1999, to 3.9 in 2005, and to 4.3 in 2011. With recent findings, the macaque population has returned to that of nearly 20 years ago.

Habitat destruction and poaching have been the main culprits of dwindling macaque numbers in the past. A native North-Sulawesi tradition of eating the monkeys as food for special occasions has also contributed to the primate's decline. Although the researchers don't chastise natives for eating the primates, they promote awareness, especially among the youth, that continued hunting and consumption of the animals could lead to extinction.

"The future of these animals is questionable," Kyes said. "If you look at their habitat, it is essentially a fragment. In the future the genetic variability of that population is going to shrink; it will eventually reach some level of homogeneity or loss of diversity that will probably spell the end of that population."

Local and international groups are helping to reduce hunting and habitat disruption and spread awareness about the endangered macaques. Researchers hold a yearly field course for local students and community members, which teaches conservation biology and global health. Kyes hopes in the future that some of these local people will become leaders in the population-assessment and conservation programs.

Kyes travels back to the reserve every year and continues the ongoing assessment of the black macaque population. He plans to go back this May to continue conducting the survey and the annual field course with the local university students.

Freshman Emily Holtermann, who plans to major in biology, says Kyes' research is



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inspirational to her.

"As a biology student, I am glad to see ongoing overseas research projects that I can be a part of in the future," she said.

Reach reporter Karina Mazhukhina at news@dailyuw.com. Twitter: @karina9m

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