Status of crop raiding by Assamese monkeys (*Macaca assamensis*) along the Budhigandaki river, central Nepal

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ABSTRACT

Crop depredation study was done on Assamese monkeys (Macaca assamensis) in Budhigandaki river basin lving on Dhading and Gorkha districts of central Nepal. The field study was conducted from February 2015 to January 2016 spending 1804 hours to explore the ecology and feeding behavior of Assamese monkeys. The study mainly focused at Kalleri village of Salang village development committee of Dhading district and Baseri, Majhitar and Siurenitar villages of Ghyalchok village development committee of Gorkha district. A total of 16 individuals of Assamese monkeys were counted at Rigdi khola of Sigrepakha community forest of Salang village development committee of Dhading district whereas a total of 13 individuals of Assamese monkeys were counted at Sandkhola of Benigam community forest and a total of 14 individuals of Assamese monkeys counted at Siurenitar of Ghyalchok village development committee of Gorkha district. Crop raiding data were collected by questionnaire survey method to local households in the nearby villages and also by direct observation. It was found that maize (58.43%) was the highest raided, followed by rice (11.34%), lentil (8.74%), peanut (4.35%), soyabean (4.18%), wheat (3.22%), fruits (2.97%), black pulses (1.87%), potato (1.67%), sesham (0.92%), tomato (0.79%), millet (0.67%), mustard (0.36%), broad beans (0.25%), brown lentil (0.18%) and pumpkin (0.06%).

Keywords: Macaca assamensis, crop raid, questionnaires, local villagers, Budhigandaki riverside

INTRODUCTION

Human non-human primates conflict are increasing to the developing countries than developed countries due to greater biodiversity and lack of prevention measures such as farm fences, livestock guard (Seoraj-Pillai & Pillay, 2016). In addition, behavioral adaptability of the macaques facilitates to invading human settlement, and as a result conflicts occur. However, the interaction between the primates and people is referred to as human primate's conflict, which has negative impact on the resources, habitats of both primates and people (Hill *et al.,* 2002; Hockings & Humle, 2009; Khatun *et al.,* 2013; Ahsan & Uddin, 2014).

Crop raiding primates is the example of human-primates' conflicts, where most of the local people are subsistence farmers (Hill, 1988). Crop raiding is a major issue for human-primates' conflict and conservation of primates (Hill, 1988; Ahsan & Uddin, 2014). Human primates conflicts are increasing because of conversion to agricultural lands to human settlements as a

Ghimire and Chalise: Status of crop raiding by Assamese monkeys......295

result primate invade human settlement for food and damage crops that are mostly eaten by them. In some cases, primates especially baboons damage unpalatable crops that they don't eat but destroy as their own entertainment (Hill & Webber, 2010).

Assamese macaques (*Macaca assamensis*) of Nepal are considered as 'Nepal Population' by Conservation Assessment and Management Plan (CAMP) workshop 2002 due to taxonomic confusion. This population is different from Assamese monkeys described so far from south and east Asia (Jolly, 1985; Sanjay *et al.*, 2003) in respect to the head-body length, tail length, T/HB ratio and weight. The body coloration also differs than so far described one. This population is considered as a new subspecies and needs further taxonomic investigation. Assessment was carried out at the population level to highlight the status of this unique form endemic to Nepal. However, a distinct difference in color is also found in higher and lower elevations of the country, as it is recorded from the altitude of 284 m in Abukhaireni, Tanahu to 2350 m in Langtang, Rasuwa of Nepal.

Local people are more aggressive towards primates when they find economic loss due to crop damage by primates (Beisner *et al.*, 2015). Palatable and unpalatable crops are damaged by primates and it depends on the availability and scarcity of food in the areas. Also, the aggressive human behaviors influence the primates to damage unpalatable crops (Khatun *et al.*, 2013; Beisner *et al.*, 2015). In Nepal, conflict between human and primates are increasing due to increased population and primates tried to coexist with human settlement areas. So human primates' conflicts are increasing. The present study reveals the crop damage by Assamese monkey (*Macaca assamensis*) of the human settlement areas during conflict with local people in Budhigandaki river basin village of Dhading and Gorkha districts of central Nepal.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study area

The study area lies at Kalleri village of Salang village development committee of Dhading district and Baseri village as well as Majhitar and Siurenitar villages of Ghyalchok village development committee of Gorkha district. This is the confluences of Budhigandaki river with Trishuli river. According to the new constitution of Nepal 2015, Dhading district lies in Province No.3 and Gorkha district lies in Province No.4.



FIG. 1. Location of research site in the map of Nepal.

The study area lies about 3 km north from Benighat bazaar of Prithvi Highway. Benighat bazaar is located at about 85 km west from Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. The study area is situated between 27° 48' 54.48" N latitude and 84° 46' 33.63" E longitude. The altitude is 401m above the sea level. The area is rich in biodiversity. Mixed type of forest especially tropical deciduous riverine forest, sub-tropical grassland and sub-tropical evergreen forest are the major types of forest along the Budhigandaki river basin (fig. 1).

Data collection

Data of crop raiding were collected from local household villagers as per the pre-set questions format as well as by direct observation of the researcher. Stratified random sampling method was used to select respondent for the questionnaire survey. Questionnaire survey was carried out to estimate the crop damage by the macaque with the local inhabitants in the Budhigandaki river basin VDCs. The main habitats of the Assamese monkeys were along the Budhigandaki river basin. More than 200 respondents were selected as sample size from the study area. The respondents were interviewed separately to ensure the independence of the individual response. The questionnaires were designed to obtain the people's perception on Assamese monkey population change in Budhigandaki river basin area and different aspects of crop raiding by the monkeys such as frequency, time of the day, types of the crop damaged, amount of annual loss due to crop raid and methods adopted to prevent the crop raid. To minimize the bias, questionnaires were asked to the villagers on the expected production of crops without crop raiding and the amounts of crops after raiding. The data were compiled together and calculated in terms of percentages as well as in quintals.

Ghimire and Chalise: Status of crop raiding by Assamese monkeys......297

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Kalleri village, Ratmate village, Tarebhir village, Chalise village, Basanta village, Kostar village and Jharlanditar village of Salang village development committee of Dhading district and Baseri village as well as Majhitar village of Ghyalchok village development committee of Gorkha district were found affected by monkey species (Rhesus, Langur and Assamese). Among all these village areas, the Kalleri village and Baseri village as well as Maihitar village were found the most affected areas by the Assamese monkeys. As shown in table 1, according to 23 respondents of Kalleri village, the total crop damage by the monkeys in this village was found 54.6 quintals in which the highest crop loss (6 quintals) was of household person Kashai Ram Darlami. The proximity of his damaged crop field to the forest is about 200 m. It was recorded 4.5 guintals loss in Ratmate village responded by 2 people. In Tarebhir village, the total loss of 9.6 guintals according to 3 respondents was found. The Chalise village crop loss was recorded 1.5 quintals responded by 2 people. It was recorded 4.8 quintals crop loss in Basanta village, 5.7 guintals crop damage in Kostar village and 0.9 guintal crop loss in Jharlanditar village. According to 25 respondents, the total crop damage by the monkeys in Baseri village was found 70.5 guintals in which the highest crop loss was recorded at Sabitri Gurung's crop field which was 7.5 guintals. The main reason of the huge amount of crop loss by the monkeys in her crop field is the proximity of damaged crop field to the forest is about 100 m. In the Majhitar village, the total crop damage by the monkeys was found 82.04 guintals which was responded by 42 local household people. In this village, the highest crop loss was recorded in two household persons' crop field namely Resham Lal Shrestha and Bir Bahadur Gurung which was 5.4 guintals each. The main reason of this huge amount of crop loss by the monkeys in both the household persons' crop field is that the proximity of damaged crop field to the forest is about less than 100 m.

S.N.	Name of village	Quintals
1.	Kalleri village	54.6
2.	Ratmate village	4.5
3.	Tarebhir village	9.6
4.	Chalise village	1.5
5.	Basanta village	4.8
6.	Kostar village	5.7
7.	Jharlanditar village	0.9
8.	Baseri village	70.5
9.	Majhitar village	82.04

TABLE 1. Village-wise cro	p damage in guintal	by Assamese monkeys.

From the study it was found that maize (*Zea mays*) was the highest raided crop, then it was followed by rice (*Oryza sativa*), lentil (*Lens culinaris*), peanut (*Arachis hypogaea*), soyabean (*Glycine max*), wheat (*Triticum aestivum*), fruits, black pulses (*Vigna mungo*), potato (*Solanum tuberosum*), sesham, tomato (*Solanum lycopersicum*), millet (*Pennisetum glaucum*), mustard (*Brassica nigra*), broad beans (*Vicia faba*), brown lentil and pumpkin (*Cucurbita pepo*). The crop raided percentage was calculated as maize 58.43%, rice 11.34%, lentil 8.74%, peanut

298 J. Nat. Hist. Mus. Vol. 30, 2016-18

4.35%, soyabean 4.18%, wheat 3.22%, fruits 2.97%, black pulses 1.87%, potato 1.67%, sesham 0.92%, tomato 0.79%, millet 0.67%, mustard 0.36%, broad beans 0.25%, brown lentil 0.18% and pumpkin 0.06%. The total crop raided percentage was calculated as 24.62% and the average loss of crop items was calculated as 29.24% (fig. 2).

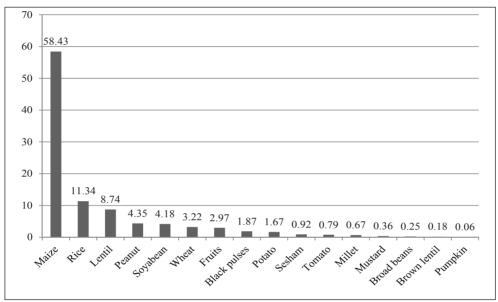


FIG. 2. Percentage of crop raids by Assamese monkeys.

In the study area, a total of 32.21 hectares of crop land was found affected by the monkey species. In that land area, total yield of crop was expected to be 951.15 quintals but 717.01 quintals was observed yield during the study period. It indicates simply that 234.14 quintals of crops was lost by the macaques. The individual crop loss in quintal is tabulated in table 2.

S.N.	Crops	Quintals	S.N.	Crops	Quintals
1.	Maize	136.81	9.	Potato	3.91
2.	Rice	26.55	10.	Sesham	2.15
3.	Lentil	20.46	11.	Tomato	1.85
4.	Peanut	10.19	12.	Millet	1.56
5.	Soyabean	9.80	13.	Mustard	0.84
6.	Wheat	7.54	14.	Broad beans	0.58
7.	Fruits	6.95	15.	Brown lentil	0.42
8.	Black pulses	4.38	16.	Pumpkin	0.15

TABLE 2. Individual crop loss in quintal by Assamese monkeys.

In Nepal, crop damage problem due to primate species especially monkeys species is acute. Crop raiding was found as a major cause of conflict though physical hurt and harassment, taking and grabbing of food materials were also reported as the problems caused by Ghimire and Chalise: Status of crop raiding by Assamese monkeys......299

monkeys. Upreti (1985) reported that buckwheat and barley were raided by wild animals in Langtang and Rara National Parks. Similarly, Jackson (1990) also recorded the damage to crops by monkeys in the southern boundary of the Makalu-Barun Conservation Area (MBCA). Hill (1997) reported that maize was a staple and preferred crop and was less vulnerable to other forms of damage. Chalise (2000b) reported that cereals, fruits and tubers are the most preferred and vulnerable for raiding by macaques in Makalu-Barun Conservation Area. Khatry (2006) also supports that maize is the prominently vulnerable crop for raiding by primates.

During the study in Langtang National Park (LNP) area, Chalise (2010) recorded that the crop depredation due to monkey species was highest in maize (43%) followed by potato (20%), millet (16%), wheat (13%), rice (7%) and buckwheat (1%). Ghimire (2000) recorded in Bandipokhara, Palpa that the highest crop loss due to monkey species was maize (34.12%) followed by potato (23.05%), rice (12.01%), fruits (11.68%), wheat (9.57%), millet (5.13%), buckwheat (2.38%) and pulses (2.06%). Paudel (2016) at his study in Kaligandaki river basin VDCs of Baglung and Parbat districts recorded the highest raided crop as maize 46.95% followed by 15.91% paddy, 15.11% potato, 10.84% millet, 6.88% wheat, 2.05% pulses, 1.59% fruits and 0.66% vegetables whereas Adhikari et al. (2018) at Ramdi area of Kaligandaki river recorded the raided crop as maize (35%), vegetables (20%), pulses (13%), fruits (13%), potato (6%) and rice (2%). In this study, it was found that the highest raided crop by Assamese monkeys was the maize 58.43% which was followed by rice 11.34%, lentil 8.74%, peanut 4.35%, soyabean 4.18%, wheat 3.22%, fruits 2.97%, black pulses 1.87%, potato 1.67%, sesham 0.92%, tomato 0.79%, millet 0.67%, mustard 0.36%, broad beans 0.25%, brown lentil 0.18% and pumpkin 0.06%. The average loss of crop items was found 29.24% and the total crop raided percentage was found 24.62%. Chalise (2001) collected the information of crop raiding by the interviews in Lakuwa village of Makalu-Barun Conservation Area and reported that Rhesus and Assamese macaques were the most crop raiders and Langurs visited the least and the villagers blamed that among the two species, Assamese monkey was the terrible than Rhesus. He stated that monkey raid heavily to the maize field 29% then followed potatoes 23% (tubers also), rice 13%, fruits 12%, and millets 12%. The tubers and fruits came to be 35% of the total loss and the total cereals came to be 65% loss in Lakuwa village. Adhikari (2013) found crop raiding by Assamese monkey in Lamjung area, 44% maize followed by 27% potato, 13% millet, 7% wheat, 4% paddy, 3% fruits and 2% vegetables. Regmi (2008) reported crop raiding in Langtang National Park by 62% for maize, 23% for potato, 7% for millet, 6% for buckwheat and 2% for other, which result (maize) is similar to the finding of the present study. The availability of natural edible food items as well as individual number of the monkeys affect the frequency of crop raid in the area.

In this study, a total of 32.21 hectares of crop land was found affected by the monkey species. In that land area, total yield of crop was expected to be 951.15 quintals but 717.01 quintals was observed yield during the study period. It is indicated that 234.14 quintals of crops was lost by the macaques. Paudel (2016) at his study in Kaligandaki river basin VDCs of Baglung and Parbat districts recorded 61.18 hectares of land utilized for the cultivation of crops in which total yield of crop was expected to be 688.29 quintals but 567.74 quintals was observed yield during the study 120.55 quintals of crops was lost by the macaques. This shows

300 J. Nat. Hist. Mus. Vol. 30, 2016-18

the productivity of the land is higher in Budhigandaki river basin area as compared to that of the Kaligandaki river basin area of Baglung and Parbat districts. The much higher crop loss household person due to Assamese monkeys was Sabitri Gurung of Baseri village, Ghyalchok village development committee of Gorkha district, which was 7.5 quintals. The main reason of the huge amount of crop loss by the monkeys in her crop field is the proximity of damaged crop field to the forest is about 100 m. and only the women who were for guardening the monkeys in the crop fields. On the other hand the very little amount of crop loss due to Assamese monkeys was found on the household person Suku Maya Majhi of Majhitar village, Ghyalchok village development committee of Gorkha district, which was 0.04 quintal. The reason for very little crop loss is the nearer distance of crop fields with the human settlements which is less than 100 m. that help for guardening the monkeys.

Conflicts between people and macagues occur in three broad contexts, all stemming from the macaques' dependence on humans for food, whether directly (i.e. provisioning) or indirectly (crop-raiding, food-stealing). First, macagues damage subsistence and/or cash crops in rural locales (Chakravarthy & Thyagarai, 2005; Chalise & Johnson, 2005; Hashim et al., 2009; Priston, 2005; Riley, 2007; Supriatna et al., 1992; Suzuki & Muroyama, 2010). Consequently, in agricultural areas, macagues may be viewed as serious vertebrate pests (Engeman et al., 2010; Knight, 1999; Marchal & Hill, 2009; Wang et al., 2006; Wheatley, 2011). In rural Morocco, macagues damage commercially valuable timber by stripping the bark (Camperio Ciani et al., 2001). Second, macagues habituated to close interaction with people at temples and tourist attractions frequently show undesirable behaviors associated with provisioning, including human-directed aggression and food-snatching (Fa, 1992; Fuentes & Gamerl, 2005; Zhao, 2005). Third, in urban towns and cities, macagues are sometimes regarded as a worrisome, potentially dangerous nuisance. Typical problem behaviors include physical aggression towards people, snatching bags, entering and damaging property, stealing food and other items, fouling and raiding garbage (Chauhan & Pirta, 2010a; Cortes & Shaw, 2006; Imam et al., 2002; Md-Zain et al., 2011; Sha et al., 2009; Shek, 2011; Southwick et al., 2005). The 'monkey problem may reach such proportions that urban macagues are regarded as a serious menace (Southwick & Siddigi, 2011; Southwick et al., 2005; Srivastava & Begum, 2005). A further area of 'conflict' arising from close interaction between people and macagues concerns the potential for zoonotic disease transmission (Fuentes, 2006a; Jones-Engel et al., 2006; Lane et al., 2010).

Considering their wide geographical distribution and taxonomic diversity, the macaques are perhaps the most notorious and successful of 'pest primates'. All species raid crops. Indeed, certain macaque species- the so- called weeds (Richard *et al.*, 1989)- show a preference for foraging in the mosaic of habitats created by human settlement, cultivation and pastoralism and derive a substantial portion of their diet directly or indirectly from people (Richard *et al.*, 1989). Unlike their 'pest' counterparts in Africa- the baboons and vervets-macaques have formed a commensal relationship with people in many Asian nations (Lane *et al.*, 2010; Sha *et al.*, 2009; Singh & Rao, 2004; Southwick *et al.*, 2005). Across Asia, macaques are found in proximity to villages and towns (Aggimarangsee, 1992; Southwick *et al.*, 1961; Watanabe & Muroyama, 2005); some even make a living in densely populated urban areas (e.g. *M.*

mulatta in Indian cities: Mathur & Manohar, 1990: Srivastava & Begum, 2005: M. fascicularis in residential Singapore: Lee & Chan, 2011: Sha et al., 2009). This close association with people is facilitated by human cultural attitudes that imbue monkeys with religious and/or symbolic significance (Burton, 2002; Knight, 1999; Wheatley, 1999; Wolfe, 2002). For example, in Hindu mythology, monkeys are revered as representatives of Hanuman, the monkey god, following his key role in the Ramayana, a Hindu Sanskrit epic. Although Hanuman is usually depicted as a langur (Semnopithecus entellus), in many Hindu cultures, he has come to represent all monkeys, including macagues. Consequently, orthodox Hindus consider it their sacred duty to feed macagues (Pragatheesh, 2011). More generally, macagues are commonly found in association with Hindu and Buddhist temples throughout south and southeast Asia and southern China, where they are provisioned by devotees and, at some sites, tourists (Aggimarangsee, 1992; Jones-Engel et al., 2006; Loudon et al., 2006; Medhi et al., 2007; Southwick et al., 1961; Wheatley, 1999; Zhao, 2005). Whether the monkeys themselves are objects of worship or rather the sacred temples and shrines they often inhabit (Fuentes et al., 2005), cultural beliefs held in many parts of Asia have traditionally provided a context for tolerance and a measure of protection for macaque populations. Nevertheless, this close coexistence between humans and macagues inevitably leads to conflicts. Moreover, conflicts are increasingly challenging traditional relationships between people and macagues (Knight, 1999; Southwick & Siddigi, 2011).

Some Assamese monkeys are killed each year due to their crop raiding habit. The local villagers believe that after killing some, other monkeys would scare to raid crops. Though their anger seems natural but this is against the Law and such practice will ultimately hamper the population of endangered and protected wild monkeys of Nepal. If the villagers get chance to alter their crops instead of traditional one, there seems to be no crop raiding.

The highest raided crop by Assamese monkeys was found on maize (58.43%) i.e., 136.81 quintals among the raided crops along the Budhigandaki river basin of central Nepal. Crop damage in Budhigandaki river basin area was found to be a serious social problem which may be due to the proximity of the forest to the human settlements, availability of palatable crops, abundance of safe hiding sites on the rocky outcrops on the bank of Budhigandaki river. Crop damage by wildlife including monkey species is a common problem in the mid-hills of Nepal. Wildlife becomes pest whenever a natural system is weakened. Under a systematic management scheme, such intensity can be balanced. We should educate people on the importance of wildlife and over populated species should be cropped for the well being of people and wildlife themselves.

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