

## Tapanuli orangutans

*Prelims: Current events of national and international importance | Species*

### Why in news?

*Scientists worry that Cyclone Senyar may have killed many Tapanuli orangutans, after one carcass of the critically endangered ape was found in the floodwaters.*

- **Scientific name** - Pongo tapanuliensis
- **Family** - Hominidae
- **Habitat & Distribution** - It is a **great ape species** found **exclusively** in the **Batang Toru Ecosystem of North Sumatra, Indonesia**, specifically south of Lake Toba.
- It prefers **montane and hill forests**, unlike other orangutans that inhabit lowland rainforests.
- **Range** - Their primary habitat is restricted to a small area of roughly 1,100 square kilometers.
- **Population** - Estimated at **less than 800 individuals**, making it the rarest of all great apes.

### Key Features

- **Discovery** - Discovered as a distinct species in 2017, after genetic and morphological studies showed differences from Sumatran and Bornean orangutans.
- **Evolutionary significance** - It is diverged from Sumatran orangutans approx. 3.4 million years ago, and from Bornean orangutans approx. 674,000 years ago.
- **Size & Weight** - They are similar in size to other orangutans.
  - Females are about 1.2 m tall and weigh around 37 kg.
  - Males grow in two stages - In the first stage, they are close in size to females, in second stage, fully mature males reach about 1.5 m tall and weigh around 75 kg.
- Orangutans can live **up to 60 years in the wild**.

- **Distinctive Features** - It has thicker, frizzier fur; flanged males have a mustache and beard unlike other orangutans; cheek pads are flatter with blonde fuzz.



- **Diet** - Mostly fruit, but unusually includes caterpillars and conifer cones.
- **Arboreal** - Rarely seen on the ground, likely due to predators like Sumatran tigers.
- **Reproduction** - Very slow, with long mother-offspring bonds, making population recovery difficult.
- **Ecological role** - It act as a ***keystone species***, vital for seed dispersal and maintaining forest biodiversity.
- **Conservation Status**
  - **IUCN** - Critically Endangered
- **Threats** - Deforestation, roads and mining fragmenting forests, illegal hunting and pet trade.

## References

1. [Down to Earth | Scientists warn Cyclone Senyar may have pushed Tapanuli orangutan closer to extinction](#)
2. [NEPC | Tapanuli orangutans](#)