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WITHIN SITE VARIATION IN THE FEEDING ECOLOGY OF THE NILGIRI LANGUR (*SEMNOPITHECUS JOHNII*) IN HUMAN ALTERED LANDSCAPES: IMPLICATIONS FOR LONG TERM SURVIVAL

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Most tropical forests in Asia are increasingly subjected to or modified by human activities. Studying within site variation in foraging behavior helps in assessing the adaptability of a species to survive in human altered landscapes; such studies are limited and seldom reported. The objective of this study was to record variation, if any, in diet and ranging across groups from an area that represents a marginal habitat for a threatened species, the Nilgiri langur. The study site represents a habitat disturbed severely in the past from conversion of forest to teak plantations, construction of dams, flash floods, fuel-wood extraction, poaching and presence of human settlement. Feeding and ranging data from five uni-male langur groups was collected from October 2003 to September 2004. Results show that species richness in diet and the plant species fed on varied considerably across groups and differed from that reported for the population from earlier studies conducted prior to the flash flooding. The diet consisted mainly of low-elevation, dry-forest species and included as many as five non-native species. The top 15 food plants included eight species that are cultivated or of ornamental use. The home range size decreased considerably with increased disturbance. This study reveals the ecological adaptability of the Nilgiri langur, which originally inhabit wetter forests, and are able to survive in marginal habitats and suggests that the conservation approach for this threatened species should primarily focus on reducing poaching and also address the threat of increasing accessibility to remote forests which protect these animals from being poached.

Keywords: Nilgiri langur, Ecological adaptability, Conservation implications, Kalakad-Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve