

Headline: Fragile creatures

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There's a dark shadow on the holiday season that is now upon us: the fragility of our environment, as underscored by the climate change conference in Paris, the resulting consensus of which is most crucial to the planet. That fragility is brought home to our part of the world by El Niño, which threatens to be severe, as well as a poignant report that the Philippine tarsier is now on the most-endangered list.

This El Niño promises to affect the global weather and to continue to cause damage well into the spring of 2016, according to Axel van Trotsenburg, the World Bank's vice president for East Asia-Pacific. "The risk is especially great for East Asia-Pacific countries that are highly vulnerable to altered weather patterns because of climate change," he warned in a commentary. "This year will likely be the hottest ever recorded, increasing the El Niño effect caused by weakened trade winds that fail to push warmer Pacific Ocean waters to the west." Van Trotsenburg also noted the Philippine government's forecast "that 80 percent of the country will likely experience drought by February 2016."

The searing heat has led to frightening weather disturbances that set records in sheer strength and resulting devastation. "The fact is already there—that the typhoons are getting stronger," Lucille Sering, the chair of the Climate Change Commission of the Philippines, told reporters recently. "There are several factors that create a typhoon. It's like a dish. There are different ingredients. And in a typhoon, one of the ingredients is increase in temperature... The increase in temperature [is] really making the typhoons stronger."

The prevailing dangerous times are also particularly illustrated by the recent announcement of wildlife experts that more than half of the primates worldwide are facing extinction as a result of habitat destruction and hunting.

For the first time ever, the list of at-risk species now includes the Philippine tarsier (*Carlito syrichta*), according to scientists who attended a conference in Singapore last week. "This research highlights the extent of the danger facing many of the world's primates. We hope it will focus people's attention on these lesser known primate species, some of which most people will probably have never heard of," leading primatologist Christoph Schwitzer, director of conservation at Britain's Bristol Zoological Society, told Agence France-Presse.

As seeming proof of the worrisome state of the animal first discovered in the 18th century and found only in southern parts of the country, the scientists' statement listed its current population as unknown. The Philippine Tarsier Foundation, a nongovernment organization devoted to the animal's protection, estimates the remaining population on the island of Bohol at 700.

The tiny Philippine tarsier—which is featured prominently in local tourism advertising—is particularly vulnerable because it is not successfully bred in captivity. Humans charmed by its cute appearance are generally ignorant of the fact that it has a tendency to commit suicide because it is easily stressed. When stressed, it hits its head repeatedly against things, and it succumbs to massive injuries to its thin skull.

It's distressing to note that the tarsier has come to this endangered state despite various forms of protective legislation including Proclamation No. 1030, signed by President Fidel Ramos in 1997,

which identified the animal as a “specially protected faunal species.”

As Environment Secretary Ramon Paje once remarked, “We should not look at [tarsiers] as our property, but part of God’s creation that we are meant to coexist with... Wildlife is not really meant for our enjoyment, especially when extracted [from its habitat].”

It behooves all of us to come to grips with these realities, the better to plan for contingencies, and, most important, to conserve what’s left of our national treasures. With the danger posed by severely shifting weather conditions, Filipinos need to prepare for what comes next and to work to reverse the effects of climate change.

Like the Philippine tarsier, we are all endangered. In the face of climate change, we are all fragile creatures.

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