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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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Gigantopithecus blacki extinction and human threats to *Tapanuli orangutans*: lessons from past and present challenges

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Abstract

Background This letter explores the historical challenges faced by *Gigantopithecus blacki*, a colossal ape, during the Pleistocene period in southern China, emphasizing its extinction approximately 300,000 years ago due to climate change. *Main body*: Drawing parallels, the research sheds light on the imminent threat to *Tapanuli orangutans* in Southeast Asia, underscoring the role of human intervention. The paradox emerges as Homo sapiens, despite claiming wisdom, becomes a significant threat through climate change and deforestation, exacerbated by the dissemination of scientific misinformation. *Conclusion*: The text urges humanity to reorient its development, emphasizing the need for responsible environmental stewardship to ensure a sustainable and balanced future for both Earth and its primate inhabitants.

Keywords *Gigantopithecus blacki*, Pleistocene extinction, *Tapanuli orangutans*, Human intervention, Environmental stewardship

Background

Gigantopithecus blacki, a colossal ape measuring 3 m and weighing up to 300 kg, defied the challenges of the Ice Age (Pleistocene period) for more than 2 million years in southern China, feeding exclusively on plants. However, approximately 300,000 years ago, it faced extinction due to climate change, as recorded in the journal Nature, which may offer us important lessons (Basin and Provinces 2023). Simultaneously, the orangutan survived the same events but now faces an imminent threat due to human intervention. The *Tapanuli orangutan*, being the most endangered species of large primates, is at an even greater risk than anticipated, according to a recent study (Meijaard et al. 2021).

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Main body

These events in Southeast Asia highlight that even robust and adaptable primates are not invulnerable in the face of climate change and habitat degradation. The paradox emerges when we observe that *Homo sapiens*, the self-styled wise man, is the main agent of these threats, contributing significantly to climate change and deforestation. The dissemination of scientific fake news by some incautious 'sapiens' denying the serious climate phenomena aggravates the understanding of the challenges faced, as is currently the case with the Brazilian Amazon Rainforest (Silva 2023). To avoid a fate like that of its Asian cousins, humanity urgently needs to reorient its development. Scientists have long been warning about the limits of natural resources and the potentially irreversible consequences of climate change.

Conclusion

It is imperative that we give credence to these warnings by fundamentally changing our relationship with natural resources and with nature itself. Only in this way will we

be able to avoid irreversibility that could culminate in our own extinction, guaranteeing a sustainable and balanced future for the Earth and avoiding the fate of our cousins.

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Publisher's Note

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