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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Climate-Fuelled Landslides and the Brink of Extinction

DOWN TO EARTH

15 June 2026 · ENVIRONMENT · GS3

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

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Down to Earth 15 June 2026 GS3

INTERVIEW ANGLE

"We usually think of extinction as a slow decline. But a single climate-driven disaster wiped out a chunk of a species in days. How should conservation prepare for sudden, climate-fuelled shocks, not just gradual loss?"

Source: Original editorial ↗ Down to Earth

Every fact web-verified against primary sources HOW

WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

Climate-intensified rainfall triggered landslides that may have killed about **58 Tapanuli orangutans**, roughly 7 percent of the world's rarest great ape, in days. For an aspirant, this is a GS3 case on **climate change, biodiversity loss and the new threat of sudden, climate-fuelled extinction events**.

THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

Extreme rainfall, intensified by **climate change** (confirmed by attribution science), triggered landslides that likely killed about **58 Tapanuli orangutans**, around 7 percent of the fewer than 800 surviving. A slow-breeding species cannot absorb such a sudden loss. The case shows climate change can cause **sudden extinction events**, not only gradual decline, demanding new conservation tools.

THE ISSUE, DECODED

CONCEPT	WHAT IT MEANS	WHY IT MATTERS
Attribution science	Measuring climate's role in an event	Links the disaster to warming
Sudden extinction event	A catastrophe wiping out many at once	A new kind of climate threat
Small-population vulnerability	Few individuals, slow breeding	Cannot recover from sudden loss
Habitat connectivity	Linked, protected habitats	Spreads risk across a species

THE ANALYSIS: EXTINCTION ARRIVES SUDDENLY

1. **Climate made it worse.** Attribution analysis found warming sharply intensified the storm's rainfall.
2. **A catastrophic share lost.** About 7 percent of the species died in days, a near-irrecoverable blow.
3. **Slow recovery.** A slow-breeding species may take a decade to recover, if it can.
4. **Conservation's gap.** The field is built around chronic threats and is less ready for acute climate shocks.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

the **Tapanuli orangutan** *(Pongo tapanuliensis), described in 2017, found only in the Batang Toru ecosystem in Sumatra; fewer than 800 survive; IUCN* **Critically Endangered**. **The science: extreme-event attribution**, *which quantifies how much climate change altered the likelihood or intensity of a specific weather event.* **The frameworks:** *the* **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework**; *India's parallel commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity.* **Concept:** *the sixth mass extinction; population viability; climate-disaster risk.*

THE DEBATE

Argument that climate shocks are a new frontier: Sudden, climate-fuelled disasters can wipe out a large share of a species at once; conservation must integrate climate-disaster risk, not just chronic threats.

Argument that chronic threats dominate: Habitat loss and human pressure remain the leading drivers of extinction; single climate disasters, though tragic, are a smaller factor.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT IT

Frame the answer around extinction as **both gradual and sudden** in a warming world. Use attribution science to link the disaster to climate change, then argue that conservation must add **climate-disaster risk** to its toolkit alongside habitat protection. Avoid treating climate and habitat threats as rivals; they compound.

THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

Picture a small flock of rare birds sheltering on a single hillside. A slow drought might thin them over years, the familiar story. But a sudden landslide can take most of them in an afternoon. Climate change is making the hillside more prone to landslides, and the flock has nowhere else to perch.

PYQ LINKAGE

UPSC has asked about biodiversity loss, climate change and conservation. This editorial connects those to the emerging threat of sudden, climate-driven extinction events.

THE ONE-LINE TAKEAWAY

Climate change is turning extinction into a sudden event; conservation must prepare for climate-fuelled shocks, not only gradual decline, to save the rarest species.

Source: Climate-Fuelled Landslides and the Brink of Extinction — Ujiyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

Extreme rainfall intensified by human-driven climate change triggered landslides that likely killed about 58 Tapanuli orangutans, roughly 7 percent of the fewer than 800 surviving, showing how a single climate-fuelled disaster can push an already endangered species toward extinction in days.

✓ **SUPPORTING**

- Attribution science links the extreme rainfall to climate change, which intensified the storm's precipitation, turning a weather event into a conservation catastrophe.

- Species with very small populations and slow reproduction, like the Tapanuli orangutan, cannot absorb sudden losses, so recovery could take a decade or may not happen.
- Conservation has focused on gradual threats like habitat loss and poaching, and is less prepared for sudden climate shocks.

⚠ COUNTER

Some argue that habitat loss and human pressure remain the dominant drivers of extinction, and that single climate disasters, while tragic, are a smaller factor than chronic threats.

→ WAY FORWARD

Integrate climate-disaster risk into species conservation, protect and connect habitats to spread risk, build population resilience, and treat extreme-weather attribution as a tool for conservation planning.

🧠 **PRACTICE TODAY'S QUIZ**

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✍ MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

QUESTION

"Climate change is making extinction a sudden event, not only a gradual decline." Examine with reference to climate-driven disasters and biodiversity. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

Extinction is usually imagined as a slow fading. The death of about 58 of the world's rarest orangutans in a matter of days, in landslides made worse by a warming climate, shows it can also arrive suddenly.

BODY

The Tapanuli orangutan, found only in a small ecosystem in Sumatra, is among the rarest great apes, with fewer than 800 left. When extreme rainfall from a powerful storm triggered landslides across their habitat, an estimated 58 individuals, roughly 7 percent of the entire species, were likely killed in a few days.

Attribution analysis, the science of asking how much climate change intensified a specific weather event, found that human-driven warming sharply increased the storm's rainfall. This is the heart of the matter: climate change does not only erode habitats slowly; it can manufacture sudden, catastrophic events that wipe out a large share of a small population at once.

For a species that reproduces slowly, such a loss is nearly irrecoverable; recovery, if it happens, could take a decade. The implication for conservation is significant.

The discipline has been built largely around chronic threats, habitat loss, fragmentation, poaching, and is less prepared for acute, climate-fuelled shocks. Protecting biodiversity in a warming world therefore requires new tools: integrating climate-disaster risk into conservation planning, protecting and connecting habitats so that a single disaster cannot take a whole population, and building the resilience of small populations.

The orangutans of Sumatra are a warning that the sixth extinction may arrive not only as a slow tide but as sudden waves.

CONCLUSION

Climate change is turning extinction into a sudden event. Conservation must prepare for climate-fuelled shocks, not only gradual decline, if the rarest species are to survive a warming world.

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