

Saola

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Saola Latest News

An international team of scientists has successfully mapped the genome of the Saola using tissue fragments obtained from hunter-collected remains, marking a critical step in understanding and conserving this species.

About Saola

- The **Saola (*Pseudoryx nghetinhensis*)** is one of the **rarest large land mammals** in the world and is often dubbed the **“Asian Unicorn”** due to its elusive nature.
- The **Saola was first scientifically discovered in 1992** during a joint expedition by the **Vietnamese Ministry of Forestry and WWF**.
- The animal is characterised by **long, straight, and parallel horns up to 20 inches**, found in both **males and females**, and **striking white facial markings**.
- It is currently listed as **Critically Endangered** on the **IUCN Red List**, with an estimated population of only **50 to 300 individuals** as per the **2015 assessment**.

Habitat and Distribution

- The **Saola** is found exclusively in the mist-covered evergreen forests of the **Annamite Mountains** along the **Vietnam-Laos border**.
- These forests have **little or no dry season** and are known for their dense canopy and unique biodiversity.

Major Threats

- The species is threatened by **widespread snaring, illegal hunting, and deforestation due to human activities** such as **agriculture and burning**.
- Its **habitat fragmentation** and **low reproductive numbers** make it particularly vulnerable to **extinction**.

Why Genome Mapping Matters

- For the **first time**, scientists have **mapped the complete genome** of the saola using **DNA fragments from remains** found in **hunter households**.
- Genomic data were compiled for **26 saola individuals**, offering **valuable insights into genetic diversity**, population structure, and conservation potential.

Key Genetic Findings

- The analysis revealed that **saola populations split** into **two distinct genetic groups** between **5,000 and 20,000 years ago**, likely due to **changes in forest habitats** after the **Last Glacial Maximum**.
- The shift from **hunter-gatherer** to **agricultural societies (~4,000 years ago)** led to **increased hunting**, **forest loss**, and **genetic isolation** of populations.
- Each group **lost different segments of genetic diversity**, meaning their **gene pools are complementary**—when combined, they can **restore overall diversity** crucial for species survival.

Saola FAQs

Q1. What is the Saola, and where is it found?

Ans. The Saola is a critically endangered mammal endemic to the Annamite Mountains of Laos and Vietnam.

Q2. Why is the Saola referred to as the 'Asian Unicorn'?

Ans. Due to its extreme rarity and elusive nature, the Saola is often called the 'Asian Unicorn'.

Q3. What is the IUCN status of the Saola?

Ans. The Saola is listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List due to habitat loss and hunting.

Source: DTE

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/saola/>

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