

Hoolock gibbon status and conservation: Editorial

Stephen Browne¹, Frank Momberg¹ and Thomas Geissmann²

¹ Fauna & Flora International, 4th Floor, Jupiter House, Station Road, Cambridge, CB1 2JD, U.K.
E-mail: stephen.browne@fauna-flora.org

² Anthropological Institute, University Zürich-Irchel, Zürich, Switzerland.
E-mail: thomas.geissmann@aim.uzh.ch

The hoolock gibbons (genus *Hoolock*) are one of four known genera of gibbons or small apes. Their natural range extends from east of the Brahmaputra River to west of the Salween River, and includes forested areas from eastern India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and southern China.

Currently, two species of hoolock gibbons are recognized; the western hoolock (*H. hoolock*) and the eastern hoolock (*H. leuconedys*) (Geissmann, 2007). Their respective ranges are separated by the Chindwin River (Groves, 1967, 1972). However, the boundary between the two species is uncertain in the Chindwin headwaters in northern Myanmar and possibly includes a zone of intermediates or variable population (e.g. Groves, 1967; Ngwe Lwin *et al.*, 2011, this issue). Furthermore, it has been suggested that an undescribed new taxon of hoolock gibbons may occur in the northeastern part of India's Arunachal Pradesh State (Das and Biswas, 2009).

Main threats to hoolock gibbons include habitat loss and fragmentation, and hunting for food and traditional "medicine" (Geissmann, 2007).

According to the IUCN Red List assessment, the western hoolock is Endangered, whereas the eastern hoolock is Vulnerable (IUCN, 2010). The western

form is considered less threatened mainly because of the larger habitat areas that are believed to support this species in Myanmar. Whereas the status of the hoolock gibbons in Bangladesh, NE-India, and China has been assessed repeatedly (see articles in this issue), very little is known about the status of gibbons in Myanmar, where the main distribution areas and probably the main populations of both hoolock species are located.

Fauna & Flora International (FFI) has been working with partners to improve the conservation status of hoolock and recognizes the need for a concerted effort by all of those working on the species, if its extinction is to be avoided. In view of this FFI organized a symposium and workshop on hoolock gibbons (genus *Hoolock*) during the 23rd Congress of the International Primatological Society (IPS) in Kyoto, Japan in September 2010 (Fig. 1).

The goal was to improve the understanding of the conservation status of hoolock gibbons throughout mainland Asia, by bringing together all of those working on the species across its range. The specific objective was to better inform conservation practitioners working to protect and improve the status of the hoolock gibbon.



Fig. 1. Participants of the hoolock gibbon workshop in Kyoto, Japan, 16 Sep 2010. Standing, from left to right: Sun Guozheng, Paul Insua-Cao, Gawsia Wahidunnessa Chowdhury, Frank Momberg, Dilip Chetry, M. Anwarul Islam, Stephen Browne, M. Kamrul Hasan, and Thomas Geissmann. Front row: Fan Peng-Fei, Ngwe Lwin, Long Yongcheng, and Yan Lu.

The **specific objectives** were:

Objective 1: Provide an opportunity for researchers working on hoolock gibbons to share knowledge to inform and improve conservation of the genus.

Objective 2: Increase our knowledge of the hoolock gibbon by organizing a workshop to undertake a status review and produce a conservation action plan so that effort and resources are appropriately targeted.

To achieve these objectives we brought together over 40 people with an interest in hoolock gibbon conservation specifically, and more generally those working on other gibbon species. A series of presentations from each range country was given to provide an update on the species' status, plus presentations on ongoing conservation activities.

The present issue of the Gibbon Journal contains papers resulting from the presentations given at the Hoolock Symposium. The papers resulting from a similar event, focussing on crested gibbons will be collected in the following issue of the Gibbon Journal.

Acknowledgements

We thank all those who participated in the symposium and workshop sessions at the IPS, particularly those who gave presentations and produced papers for publication in the Gibbon Journal. We also thank the IPS Congress organizers and Scientific Committee for allowing us to hold these sessions. These sessions and the publication of these papers would not have been possible without funding from the IUCN/SSC Primate Specialist Group, provided by the Arcus Foundation, and from Fauna & Flora International. We are particularly grateful to Liz Williamson

and Helga Rainer for their help in securing the funding.

References

- Das, J., and Biswas, J. (2009). Review of western hoolock gibbon (*Hoolock hoolock*) and eastern hoolock gibbon (*Hoolock leuconedys*) diversity with a presence of another new distinct variety of gibbon in Arunachal Pradesh, India. *American Journal of Primatology* **71** (Suppl.): 72 (Abstract only).
- Geissmann T. 2002. Taxonomy and evolution of gibbons. In: Soligo C, Anzenberger G, Martin RD, editors. *Anthropology and primatology into the third millennium: the Centenary Congress of the Zürich Anthropological Institute* (Evolutionary Anthropology Vol. 11, Supplement 1). Wiley, New York, pp. 28-31.
- Groves, C. P. (1967). Geographic variation in the hoolock or white-browed gibbon (*Hylobates hoolock* Harlan 1834). *Folia Primatologica* **7**: 276-283.
- Groves, C. P. (1972). Systematics and phylogeny of gibbons. In Rumbaugh, D. M. (ed.), *Gibbon and siamang, vol. 1*, Karger, Basel and New York, pp. 1-89.
- IUCN (2010). *IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2010.4*. <www.iucnredlist.org>. Downloaded on 31 March 2011.
- Lwin, N., Geissmann, T., Aung, S. S., Aung, T. N., Aung, Z. M., Hla, T. H., Grindley, M., and Momberg, F. (2011). The Myanmar Hoolock Gibbon Conservation Status Review: First results on western and eastern hoolocks in Myanmar. *Gibbon Journal* **6**: 18-21.