

Guide to
South Asian Primates

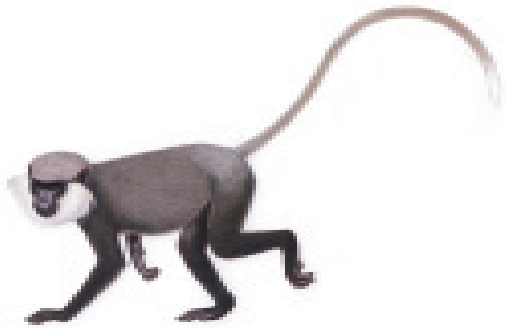
for Teachers and Students of All Ages

Lorises Langurs Macaques Gibbons



Compiled and Edited by
Sally Walker and Sanjay Molur

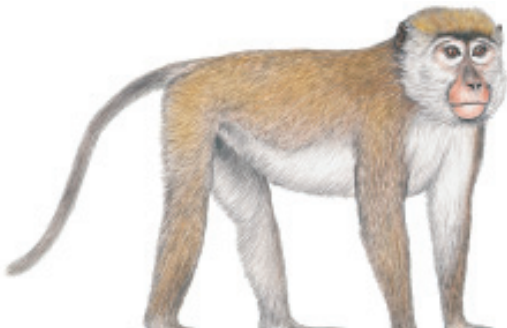
Illustrations by Stephen Nash



Guide to South Asian Primates for Teachers and Students of All Ages

**Sally Walker & Sanjay Molur
(Compilers & Editors)**

**Compiled from Status of South Asian Primates.
Report of the Conservation Assessment and Management
Plan CAMP Workshop 2003, recent notes on
primates taxonomy from several sources and
practical action suggestion for kids**





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Gibbons

Alan Mootnick, Director, Gibbon Conservation Center, Santa Clarita, California

Gibbons, of the Family Hylobatidae, are the smallest of the five ape species. Apes are known for having a much larger brain than a monkey of the same weight, having longer arms than legs, and for the placement of their scapular, which allows apes to be true brachiators.



Depending on the species, an adult gibbon weighs between 6 and 22 Kilos. They are the only nonhuman primate that naturally walks upright, and does not need to rely on its hands to walk. When standing, some gibbon species are as tall as 95 centimeters. Because gibbons' arms are approximately 1.5 times longer than their legs, their arms can act as pendulums when swinging (brachiating) through the forest canopy. From a hanging position, they are able to pull themselves 4 meters horizontally to the next branch, and once a gibbon's momentum is created, it is able to brachiate at speeds of 40 kilometers per hour, with leaps of 15 meters in a horizontal plane. They are the only nonhuman primate that can pull their body in an upwards motion during brachiation. Because of all this, they are known as the world's greatest acrobats.

The name gibbon could be derived from the Latin word, "gibbus", meaning hump or hunchback, which is a typical sitting posture of a gibbon, or from an old Chaldic word meaning ape.

The gibbon and orangutan are the only apes native to the Asian forests. The orangutan is only found in Southeast Asia, whereas the gibbon inhabits the tropical and semi-deciduous forests of South, East, and Southeast Asia. Gibbons are distributed from Northeast India and Bangladesh eastward to Yunnan China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and south to the Malaysian Peninsula, Sumatra, Borneo, and Java.

Gibbons are characterized by long-term pair bonding. The gibbons' territorial vocalization can be heard up to 2 kilometers, which helps define their boundaries to neighbouring gibbons. A gibbon family consists of an adult male and female, and from 1 to 4 offspring.

Once the offspring are sexually mature, they leave their family group to establish their own territory. The gibbons' long, razor sharp canines assists them in territorial defense, in holding fruit in their mouth when traveling through the forest canopy, and opening tough-skinned fruits. Over the years, numerous scientists have studied gibbon behavior in the Asian forests, but because of the gibbons' elusive nature, they are not easily observed. Understanding more about this fascinating primate gives us better insight into our ecosystems. Since gibbons eat an abundance of fruit, and require up to 200 hectares of forest for their family to survive, the gibbon aids with seed dispersal in the regeneration of new trees.

Gibbons are recognized as belonging to four genera and 15 species. Some gibbon species go through coat colour changes during infancy and before adulthood. All gibbons are recognized as endangered, and the rarest primate in the wild is one of the gibbon species, *Nomascus nasutus hainanus*. This species is found on the island of Hainan China, with only 17 individuals surviving. Depending on which country a gibbon lives in, their demise is due to: loss of habitat by forest fires and logging, collection of wood for cooking, capture for the pet trade, medicinal purposes, use as a food source, and, in some cases, to obtain the bones from their forearms for chop sticks. Only infant gibbons are desirable in the pet trade. Once a captive gibbon is an adult, it is not manageable. In order to obtain an infant gibbon from the forest, a poacher shoots the mother, and if the infant survives the fall from the forest canopy, the infant will end up in a marketplace waiting for someone to purchase it. Generally the infant gibbon is malnourished during its time away from its family, and rarely survives to maturity. With the rapid decrease of the forests worldwide, gibbons suffer from this loss. The gibbons' vocalizations are the sounds of the forest, and when the forest vanishes, so will their territorial call.

What's in a name ? Before 1982 there were 3 subgenera of gibbon, and 1 genus, *Hylobates*. In 1983 when scientists learned that hoolock gibbons had 38 chromosomes they place the hoolock gibbon its own subgenus, *Bunopithecus*. In 2005 scientist felt that there were enough differences between the four subgenera of gibbons, and elevated them to four genera, and at that time decided to rename the genus for the hoolock gibbon to *Hoolock*.

The Western Hoolock Gibbon has been listed by the Primate Specialist Group of the World Conservation Union as one of the 25 most endangered primates in the world in the 2007-8 listing.

Hoolock hoolock

Western Hoolock Gibbon

Family: Hylobatidae

Status: **ENDANGERED** IN SOUTH ASIA

Common names:

Assamese: Holou bandar; **Bengali:** Ulluk

Bilaspuri: Bonmanush; **Bodo:** Hulu makhra

Garo: Heru, Huru; **Hindi:** Uluk; **Karbi:** Jambli, Kinghoiduk; **Khasi:** Hulu, Hulaing; **Manipuri:** Yommu; **Mizo:** Hahuk; **Nepali:** Bon Manchhe

Rai: Sokpha; **Rankhol:** Saha; **Riang:** Hulao

Rongmi: Paang; **Rukni:** Hoolau;

English: Western Hoolock Gibbon, Hoolock Gibbon



Habit: Terrestrial, arboreal, brachiator, frugivorous, diurnal, monogamous, territorial.

Habitat: Tropical forests of different types.

Niche: Middle, upper/ top canopy dweller.

Diet: Ficus leaves, fruits, small birds, reptiles, insects.

Elevation: 10-1,400m.

Habitat status: Decreasing in area by about one third in last 10 years because of habitat loss and encroachment. Decrease in quality of habitat also - loss of fruiting & sleeping trees and increase in canopy gaps.

Distribution: Bangladesh, India, Myanmar

Total Population: About 3000 in South Asia.

Threats to its survival: Habitat loss and fragmentation, logging, firewood collection, *jhuming*, charcoal production, human settlement, roads, dams, etc., hunting for food, zoos, pets, traditional medicine, accidental mortality.

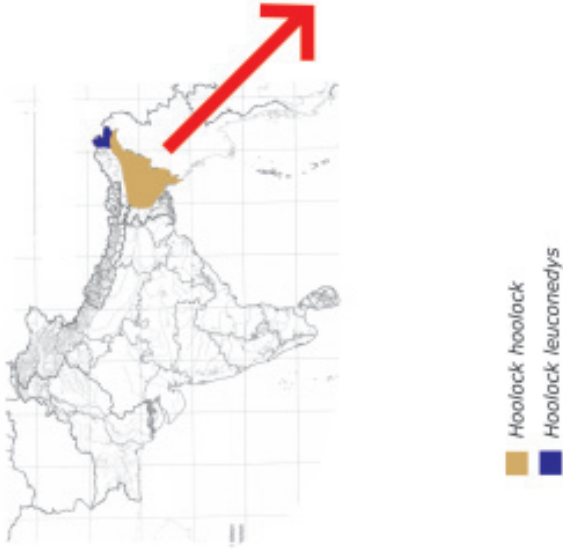
Trade of animal or parts: Widespread trade for blood, bones, fur, meat for food and medicine & live animals for zoos and as pets.

Wildlife legislation: **Bangladesh:** Schedule III, Bangladesh Wildlife (Preservation) (Amendment) Act, 1974. **India:** Schedule I, Part I, Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 amended up to 2002.

What you can do to save Western Hoolock Gibbon:

- Do **not** request your zoo director to get them.
- Don't keep as pets or admire others who do so.
- Support laws which set aside large natural areas for animals or ask your family to do so.

Hoolock Gibbons in South Asia



Hoolock leuconedys

Eastern Hoolock Gibbon

Family: Hylobatidae

Status: DATA DEFICIENT IN SOUTH ASIA

Common names:

Rongmi: Paang; **Rukni:** Hoolau;

English: Eastern Hoolock Gibbon, Hoolock Gibbon

Habit: Terrestrial, arboreal, brachiator, frugivorous monogamous, territorial.

Habitat: Tropical forests of different types.

Niche: Middle, upper/ top canopy dweller.

Diet: Ficus leaves, fruits, small birds, reptiles, insects

Elevation: Below 1,400m.

Habitat status: More stable than Western Hoolock Gibbon habitat.

Distribution: China, India, Myanmar.

Total Population: Not known.

Threats to its survival: Not known.

Trade of animal or parts: Marginal trade.

Wildlife legislation: **India:** Schedule I, Part I, Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 amended up to 2002.

What you can do to save Western Hoolock Gibbon:

- Do ***not*** request your zoo director to get them.
- Don't keep as pets or admire others who do so.
- Support laws which set aside large natural areas for animals or ask your family to do so.



