

# REPORT ON GIBBON CONSERVATION WORKSHOP

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Workshop participants were based at zoos, universities, and nongovernmental organizations. Participants described four overlapping areas of concern for gibbon conservation: lack of effective communication about the plight of gibbons; lack of wildlife law enforcement in range countries; concerns about the health and well-being of captive gibbon populations; and prioritization of urgent gibbon field projects.

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

### Communication

Participants noted a lack of communication among university, field, zoo, and sanctuary workers; with interested parties in range countries such as NGOs and government officials; and with the broader public that may be unaware of gibbon conservation issues or may be seeking additional information about these species. Three approaches to these problems were described:

1. Initiate a listserv maintained by the American Zoo and Aquarium Association to facilitate discussion about the gibbon research and conservation issues described throughout this report. The listserv will be used to coordinate participants' efforts on behalf of gibbons.
2. Develop a Web site maintained through the Gibbon Species Survival Plan. The Web site's primary purpose is to disseminate information about gibbons to teachers, government officials, primatology students, and professionals based at zoos, sanctuaries, or universities. The site will include general information on gibbons, a description of gibbon taxonomy, conservation issues, studbooks, curriculum guides, suggestions for wildlife policies, guidelines for housing and husbandry in zoo and sanctuary settings, a gibbon bibliography, information on fieldwork opportunities and needs, rehabilitation and reintroduction concerns of relevance for gibbons, action items for the public (letter writing, petitions), and contact information for gibbon experts. Eventually this information will be made available in several languages, with gibbon range country languages given first priority.
3. Increase efforts to enhance the visibility of gibbons and their alarming status in the wild within and outside of their range countries. This will be achieved through the Web site described above, by writing articles targeting popular wildlife and conservation magazines, through more effective lobbying of governments (see below), and by increased efforts to promote range country zoos as education outlets (see below).

### Law Enforcement

Participants expressed concern about lapses in the enforcement of laws that protect gibbons. Additionally, some range countries still lack effective wildlife laws or policies and/or lack information specific to gibbon conservation. Participants plan to address this problem through four approaches:

1. Unite as a panel of concerned professionals to more effectively represent gibbon conservation challenges to North American, European, and range country governments. Through the panel, participants will promote policies and plans that enhance development of effective wildlife laws and the enforcement of these laws.
2. Use the Web site as a source of information for governments in the development of policies and laws. The panel participants will serve as an advisory body for the development and implementation of these policies by actively offering assistance to range country governments.
3. Encourage (where appropriate) financial and educational support for park rangers and other personnel.
4. Work as a body to encourage financial support (from a variety of sources) for existing field projects and promote the initiation of new projects.

### Captive Gibbon Populations

Participants urged the revitalization of international gibbon studbooks and argued that captive management might be more effective if some or all studbook information were more widely available.

Captive gibbons (zoos, sanctuaries, rehabilitation centers, and privately owned) in some range countries are in extremely poor condition. These conditions are often inhumane, and captive breeding programs are unlikely to develop or thrive under these circumstances. Workshop participants suggested the following actions:

1. Encourage the revitalization of the international studbook, and include part or all of regional studbooks on the gibbon SSP Web site.
2. Provide assistance to zoos, sanctuaries, and rehabilitation centers about the appropriate and humane housing of gibbons, with emphasis on the breeding of species that are under-represented in captivity. Participants will achieve this individually and collectively through information provided on the Web site, visits to these institutions, and zookeeper exchange programs.
3. Help zoos, sanctuaries, and rehabilitation centers to accurately identify the gibbons in their collections. Participants will achieve this individually and collectively through information on the Web site (photographs, descriptions, vocalizations) and by traveling to these institutions to assist with identification.
4. Work with range country zoos to promote them as education centers. Workshop participants will use their educational expertise in zoo and university settings to help range country zoos more effectively describe gibbons, their habitats, and threats to their conservation.



### Urgent Gibbon Field Projects

Despite several decades of field research on gibbons, workshop participants noted that some gibbon taxa remain poorly known. Other gibbon taxa are critically endangered. Participants listed several urgent field projects based on likely or actual endangerment of gibbons in that area and based on a dearth of information about numbers and distribution of some taxa.

Participants will use the listserv to develop and promote the following actions:

- Procure financial support to build a holding facility for privately held Javan gibbons.
- Census gibbon taxa distributed in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.
- Support continued research on black crested gibbons in Yunnan Province. William Bleisch and his colleagues have developed action plans for gibbon populations in the Wuliang and Ailao Mountains; financial and other forms of support are needed to implement these plans.
- Support continued research on black crested gibbons on Hainan Island. With adequate protection, this population has grown to approximately 21 individuals. Workshop participants will encourage the continuation of this project.
- Promote the establishment of a field project for the Kloss' gibbon, which is endemic to the Mentawai Islands.
- Continue to support existing studies of the hoolock gibbon and encourage the establishment of new sites.

- Analyze the impact of the fires in Borneo on gibbon populations and, if necessary, develop an action plan on their behalf.
- Support research on the systematics of *Hylobates lar*, *H. agilis*, and *H. muelleri*. The subspecies of these gibbon species are poorly defined. Those individuals currently in captive collections cannot be reliably identified; as a result, zoos are unable to breed pure subspecies. There is the distinct possibility that additional, as yet unidentified, subspecies may exist in some of these taxa. Field surveys over the entire range of each of these species are needed to record songs of all local populations and to collect DNA samples of gibbons from known localities. These data will help to resolve taxonomic issues.

The distribution of gibbons in Myanmar also requires urgent attention, but the majority of workshop participants agreed that given the current political situation, no productive research can be done there at this time. Resources are better allocated to neighboring countries.

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