

SPECIES AND SUB-SPECIES IDENTIFICATION OF GIBBONS FOR USE BY ZOOLOGICAL PARKS AND BREEDING FACILITIES. Alan R. Mootnick and Dr. Elliott H. Haimoff, Gibbon and Gallinaceous Bird Center, Saugus, California.

The classification and systematics of gibbons (fam. Hylobatidae) have traditionally been more controversial and confusing than any other primate taxa, with proposals of their taxonomic relationship ranging from one genus and three species to three genera and twelve species. Therefore, zoos and other breeding facilities have encountered severe problems in the identification of gibbon individuals. This failure to properly identify and breed individuals from the same natural population (i.e. the same gene pool), has resulted in rampant hybridization. If one of the purposes of a zoo or breeding facility is to care for, maintain, and breed animals with the hope of one day returning their descendants back to the wild, then every effort should be made to maintain the genetic purity of breeding stocks and to produce future generations of gibbons closely resembling natural populations. A detailed study of the classification, identification, and biogeography of gibbons was conducted over a period of several years, in addition to observations being made on wild gibbons, wild-caught gibbons, and museum specimens. Based on these findings and for the general purpose of a facility where gibbons are being bred, a taxonomic revision of gibbons is proposed here comprising one genus, nine species, and eighteen sub-species. A dichotomous key has also been constructed in the identification of gibbon species and sub-species.