

Conservation Education training workshop on Hoolock Gibbons in North-eastern India: An attempt to make every teacher a conservationist and every conservationist a teacher, 1-28 February 2007, Assam.

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The Great Ape Conservation Fund, US Fish and Wildlife Service sponsored a series of conservation educator training workshops entitled "Helping Hoolock Gibbons Hang On." All the six workshops were held in Assam for Northeastern Indian participants and a few others. The theme of the workshop was the highly threatened Hoolock Gibbon (*Hoolock hoolock*) with particular reference to shared Hoolock and Tiger localities. ZOO and WILD organized the six workshops at Jalukbari, Nameri National Park, Manas National Park, Tinsukia, Silchar and Guwahati from 1-28 February 2007. We had excellent collaboration with Wildlife Areas Development and Welfare Trust, Centre for Environment Education (Northeast Region), Gibbon Conservation Centre and Wildlife Conservation Society, Bronx, USA in association with Assam Forest Department, Assam State Zoo cum Botanical Garden, SANIZE, South Asian Primate Network and CBSG South Asia.

One hundred and eighty school teachers, forest and zoo personnel, environmental educators from various NGOs, individuals like ex poachers from fringe areas of Hoolock Gibbon and Tiger localities of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh took part in this series. Selected educators from Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and field biologists working on primates from India were invited as intern trainees.

Our objective was to protect and promote the Western Hoolock Gibbon by teaching educators an active learning methodology for creating interest and affection for WHG using a whole gamut of teaching techniques. A manual featuring Hoolock Gibbon was developed using the now famous Teachers for Tigers toolkit as a frame work. The manual — '*Help(ing) Hoolock Gibbon Hang on*' — has five units viz., Introduction and evaluation methods; introduction to South Asia's only lesser ape; Hoolock Gibbon in our culture; Understanding and acting and; understanding species problems and solutions. It was translated into Assamese also, so each participant went home with two manuals. Apart from the manual, 17 different educational items, like posters, packets, stickers, t-shirts were given to each participant. In addition to this, all participants received 13 other items of related teaching literature. Finally, so that participant could put their training to work immediately, each one was given a big parcel of 75-100 Hoolock Gibbon and Tiger education packets developed by ZOO for their immediate use.

Although Hoolock Gibbon was star of the show, depending on the needs of participants and the workshop location, the tiger held centre stage in

some workshops. At Nameri and Manas, Tiger was foremost since Hoolock Gibbon does not occur locally, but a few activities from Hoolock Gibbon were also introduced. In the other four workshops in or near Hoolock habitat or for participants living as such, the Hoolock Gibbon prevailed with some tiger activities.

Activities from the Hoolock and Tiger manual:

The inaugural function was followed by either "sound-off" or an innovative "shield" activity as an icebreaker, followed by assessment methods. In these assessment methods we introduced concept



Understanding Hoolock Gibbon distribution

maps and attitudinal survey techniques. Participants made individual concept maps on the subject of Hoolock Gibbon or Tiger. In order to highlight

the plight of the Hoolock Gibbon, a special lecture by a field biologist or forester was arranged for all workshops. Also, special lectures on education itself were given. Mini dramas were the most dynamic activity and it created much interaction within the group. The participants were divided into smaller groups and they were assigned drama topics such as poaching, locomotion/communication, habitat loss, parental care and courtship etc. Next, trainers introduced basic aspects of taxonomy using Hoolock Gibbon as an example. They compared pictures of the male



Learning Tiger behaviour

and female Hoolock Gibbons of the Eastern and Western species and listed the similarities and differences.

It is important that people understand and present distribution details of any animals they study in context with conservation, so they were directed to study historical and current distribution maps of

Hoolock Gibbon and Tiger. Towards the end of first day, activities from a manual called "HELP", Habitat Ecology Learning Program was introduced. Observation games and colour challenges commonly used activities from this manual. Composing cinquain poem was the closing activity of the first day in most of the workshops. Each group was then asked to create their own poems.

Hoolock Gibbon History or Tiger time-line was the first event of the second day programme. Hoolock Gibbon/Tiger behaviour was introduced to the participants through an activity named Hoolock behaviour / From Little cats to big cats. This is a most interesting activity where the participants were taken out of doors and taught to compare



A group on the process of developing a enclosure design at the Zoo

themselves with Hoolock gibbon to understand its behaviour — brachiating, jumping, walking, eating, etc. Next we took primates in culture. Teams came up with many stories, songs and movies, names of places featuring primates and competed with one another using raucous shouts and whoops of laughter. One participant commented on these teaching methods stating : "Like a lot of people I thought education was pretty boring and although it was important for conservation it was better left to someone else to do. Now, realizing how my attitude towards how conservation functions and the conflicting compulsions that force the hands of the various players has changed, the potential for changing the attitudes of others seems very important."

Role playing is very effective in changing attitudes. Roles are assigned to participants who play advertising executives, zoo architects, song writers, artists, acrobats, TV crew. A participant who facilitates very serious conservation actions was amazed at the effectiveness of role playing. The same participant wrote that "Role Play, for instance, made me empathize with the compulsions of politicians, forest officials, tribals, etc. in ways I hadn't in the past. This leads to a willingness to

negotiate rather than confront which seems to be the driving force of Indian conservation today." This is one of the most powerful objectives we try to achieve with this training.

Feeding ecology of Tigers and Hoolock was introduced to the audience. The CAMP process was demonstrated to illustrate how scientists assess level of threats and derive a category or status of a species. A method of interviewing two characters, Hoolock and human was used to relate scientific processes through a human perspective.

Day three started with a demonstration of census techniques of Hoolock and Tiger. The most interesting activity of the day was the "Citizens' Debate" which was centered around a proposed rehabilitation package for people residing within a National Park. To relate trees' stress with Hoolock Gibbon conservation, an activity called "Resource roundup" was carried out. At the end of the last day the PHVA process was introduced convey how scientists and decision makers are able to find solutions for the problems of the species. Participants came away with an understanding of these processes.

In all workshops participants were taught methods for using the education materials supplied to them. At the end of the workshop participants made personal written commitments to take up two projects that they could carry out in the next 6 months. A post workshop assessment and an evaluation using a concept map conducted.

Workshop highlights:

Venue 1: Assam Forest School, Jalukbari. 1-3 February, 2007

The first workshop was held at Assam Forest School from 1-3 February 2007, coordinated by WWT, and attended by thirty-four participants and five trainers. Since this is the first inaugural of the workshop series many eminent people from the forest department attended. Sri H.K.Chowdhury, IFS (Retd.), Chairman WWT, Assam, one of the key player of workshop coordination welcomed the



S. Doley, PCCF, Assam Forest Department and Sally Walker releasing Assamese version of Tiger and Hoolock Gibbon manuals

gathering. Mr. S. Doley, PCCF, Assam Forest Department released the Assamese version of the Tiger manual while Ms. Sally Walker released the Assamese version of the Hoolock Gibbon manual. Mr. M.C. Malakar, CCF Wildlife (Assam) appreciated the efforts of the organizers for conducting this training programme. Ms. Walker during inaugural talk requested the gathering to wear the hoolock masks and tie the 'rakhi'. She requested the primate biologists to initiate Hoolock calls and requested all to join the call ... 'hoo-u, hoo-yu'. A special lecture was given by Sally Walker who explained different learning methods (factual learning, skill learning, concept learning and attitudinal learning), elements of developing a programme, and details on funding sources as well. On the second day Dr. Jayanta Das gave a talk entitled "Introducing Primates: Primate species in North Eastern India".

Venue 2: Nameri Eco-camp, Nameri National Park. 5-7 February, 2007

Most of the 26 participants of this workshop, coordinated by CEE, were teachers and few NGOs from Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Mr. Tana Tapi, DFO, Pakke Tiger Reserve was the guest of honour for the inaugural. Teachers for Tigers manual was used for this audience since Nameri is primarily a tiger area. However, with an intention to introduce the shared habitats of tiger and Hoolock a few activities from the hoolock manual was also tried. Sally walker gave a special lecture on the first day and second day Dr. Jihosuo Biswas, Primate Research Centre NE India spoke on Hoolock Gibbon and its habit status.

Venue 3: Manas National Park. 9-11 February 2007

Majority of the 31 participants represented NGOs and rest were from the forest department and teachers. This workshop, coordinated by WWT had the highest participation from five different countries particularly from the neighbouring Bhutan. Tiger was the subject with additions from Hoolock Gibbon Manual. Mr. R.C. Bhattacharjee, Dy. Director, Manas National Park. Ms. Nalini Mohan, WCS, and Sally Walker, were present for the inauguration. During the inaugural talk RC Bhattacharjee welcomed the efforts of Sally Walker and ZOO for organizing these important conservation workshops. He stressed the need of education for conservation among all sections of the society. Dr. Jihosuo Biswas, gave a special lecture on the first day on Hoolock Gibbon and conservation. Some of the activities took place inside the park.

Venue 4: Budding Buds Senior Secondary School, Tinsukia. 14-16 February, 2007

School teachers, local NGO representatives and a couple of foresters made up the 31 participants, 6 among them from Arunachal Pradesh. The workshop was coordinated by CEE. Mr. Anirudha Dey, DFO (WL) of Tinsukia inaugurated the workshop and Simanta Kalita of CEE, Guwahati welcomed the participants and collaborating partners such as *Ed-en* and the Budding Buds Senior Secondary School. Hoolock Gibbon was subject of the programme along with Tiger activities. First day, Dr. Dilip Chetry, Gibbon Conservation Centre, an expert on Hoolock Gibbon gave an excellent presentation on the taxon. Participants were very involve in spite of disturbed political situation.

Venue 5: Cachar College, Silchar. 21-23 February, 2007

The 29 participants of this workshop were mostly teachers from schools and colleges, NGOs, journalist, lawyer and field biologists. It was coordinated by WWT. Hoolock Gibbon was the subject of the programme with additions from Tiger manual. Dr. S.B. Paul, Controller of Examinations and Prof. B.K. Dutta, Department of Ecology and Environmental Studies, Assam University and Dr. Debashish Ker, Principal of Cachar College were present for the inaugural. Dr. Jayanta Das, WWT gave a special talk on Hoolock gibbon and conservation efforts in Assam state.

Venue 6: Assam State Zoo cum Botanical Garden, Guwahati. 26-28 February 2007.

Assam State Zoo was the venue of the last workshop of the series, which was attended by 26 participants mostly from schools and forest Department and coordinated by CEE. Dr. Narayan Mahanta, Officer in charge of the zoo inaugurated the workshop and Dr. Atul K. Gupta, CCF, Tripura was the chief guest. As a primate expert working on Hoolock Gibbon, A.K. Gupta gave a special talk after the inaugural. For the valedictory closing the workshop



Participants receiving certificates and Education packets

series, eminent personalities from the forest Department and Education Board of Assam state were invited. M.C. Malakar, CCF (Wildlife), B.S. Bonal, CCF M&E, H.K. Chowdhury, Chairman, WWT, Sawpan Doerah, Academic Officer, SEBA, Assam State, Narayan Mahanta, Assam State Zoo and ZOO representatives were present during the valedictory programme.

Convenor:

Sally Walker, Zoo Outreach Organisation, India

Coordinators/collaborators:

Nalini Mohan, WCS, Bronx / Jayanta Das, WWT, Assam / Simanta Kalita, CEE, Assam

Trainers:

B.A. Daniel, ZOO / Nalini Mohan, WCS / Payal Molur, Go Wild Workshops / R. Marimuthu, ZOO / Gawsia Choudhry, WTB, Bangladesh

Intern participants:

Rachana Shah, Central Zoo, Nepal; Lanka Dharmadasa and K. Nihal Senarath De Silva from National Zoological Gardens and Pinnewala, Sri Lanka; Syed Ali Ahasan, Dhaka Zoo, Md. Malekur Rahman, Dulahazara Safari Park and Suprio Chakma, WTI from Bangladesh; Dilip Chetry, Surajit Baruah, Rekha Medhi, Jihosuo Biswas, Arnab Roy and Janaki Lenin from India.