IUCN

SOS GIBBONS INITIATIVE

2020-2022 IMPACT REPORT

SOS KEEP NATURE STANDING IUCN

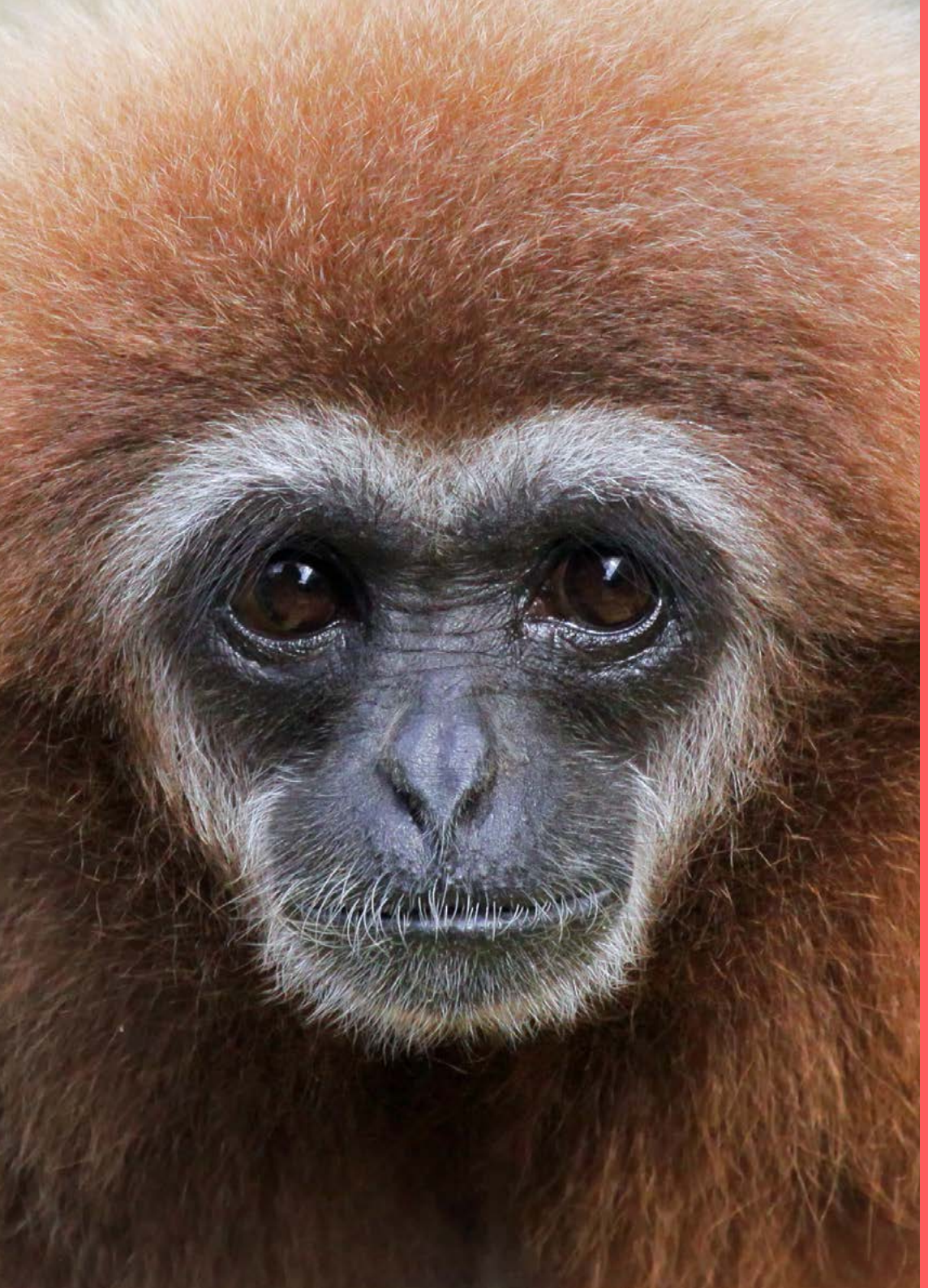


TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD

Dr Susan M Cheyne
Vice-Chair,
IUCN Species Survival Commission,
Primate Specialist Group,
Section on Small Apes

Gibbons have been described as far back as ca. 200 A.D. by Aelian (ClaudiusAelianus) a Roman who wrote about animal classification. Darwin in his Descent of Man [1871] described siamangs and agile gibbons from Sumatra (Indonesia) and discussed their singing in detail. The first study of gibbons was conducted by Clarence Ray Carpenter in 1937 as part of the Asiatic Primate Expedition – everything we know about gibbons in general came from this work. In China gibbons have been known to exist since at least the Zhou Dynasty (1027-221 B.C.), where gibbons are described as "the aristocrat among apes and monkeys". Despite the prevalence of records and stories about gibbons throughout history, we are still learning about these fascinating small apes.

All 20 species are severely threatened by habitat loss and modification, poaching for consumption and trade, the illegal trade of gibbon infants, among others and are listed on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ as Vulnerable (one species), Endangered (14 species) or Critically Endangered (five species). While casting a spotlight on the issues surrounding the gibbon trade, there is a realisation that these are multi-dimensional and need to be addressed as such. They are re-enforcing each other and cannot be tackled in isolation. These issues are:

1. Lack of law enforcement on gibbon traffickers and thus trading is seen as a low-risk crime with high return;
2. Lack of public awareness about the illegality and impacts;
3. No consequences for keeping gibbons as pets;
4. Social media platforms such as Facebook enabling the online trade;
5. Inadequate government centres for confiscated gibbons and NGO-run centres operating almost at full capacity;
6. Difficulty of releasing gibbons back to the wild due to territorial behaviour, habituation to humans, psychological and physical trauma, and risk of disease transfer to the wild population. Most importantly, we need to learn how to conserve them, as gibbons are under threat from various causes throughout their range.

The IUCN Save Our Species Gibbon initiative, running from 2019-2023, was designed to support a variety of species of gibbons and to facilitate cooperation and knowledge exchange.

Through the IUCN SOS Gibbon initiative progress has been made in the areas of developing action plans, monitoring and patrolling for gibbon protection, habitat assessment, management, and restoration, habitat improvement and corridor creation, raising awareness and community engagement. This multi-year approach is essential to allow projects to develop and effect change as well as to monitor and evaluate their actions for the conservation of gibbons.

This initiative is a wonderful example of local actions and international cooperation and I hope this continues as a model for wildlife conservation across all species.

INTRODUCTION

IUCN

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is a membership Union uniquely composed of government and civil society organisations. It provides public, private and non-governmental organisations with the knowledge and tools that enable human progress, economic development and nature conservation to take place together.

Created in 1948, IUCN is now the world's largest and most diverse environmental network, harnessing the knowledge, resources and reach of more than 1,400 member organisations and some 15,000 experts. It is a leading provider of conservation data, assessments and analysis. Its broad membership makes IUCN the global authority on the status of the natural world and the measures needed to safeguard it.

Working with many partners and supporters, IUCN implements a large and diverse portfolio of conservation projects worldwide. Combining the latest science with the traditional knowledge of local communities, these projects work to protect species, reverse habitat loss, restore ecosystems and improve people's well-being.

© Santiago Cassalett

© FFI Vietnam

THE IUCN RED LIST OF THREATENED SPECIES

The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ is the world's most comprehensive information source on the global conservation status of animal, fungi and plant species. The Red List shows where urgent conservation action needs to be taken and thus guides the selection of the IUCN Save Our Species projects.

NOT EVALUATED	DATA DEFICIENT	LEAST CONCERN	NEAR THREATENED	VULNERABLE	ENDANGERED	CRITICALLY ENDANGERED	EXTINCT IN THE WILD	EXTINCT
NE	DD	LC	NT	VU	EN	CR	EW	EX

IUCN SAVE OUR SPECIES

IUCN Save Our Species supports science-based conservation action on the ground that saves animals, plants and fungi from extinction. We focus our efforts where they will have the biggest impact by funding frontline conservation organisations across the world who have unique knowledge of their region and their local biodiversity.

The alarm has been raised repeatedly about the decline in biodiversity across the planet. As one species falls, it takes with it the whole chain of species that depend on it. Be it tigers or bees, these act as dominos falling one after the other, ultimately leading back to us and putting all of mankind at risk. This is why we must do all we can to Keep Nature Standing.

We never look at species in isolation. All IUCN Save Our Species projects not only aim to protect threatened species, but also to preserve their habitats, and improve the livelihoods of the people who depend on them. To protect threatened species with sustainable, long-term results, all our projects are structured around a three-legged approach to conservation that focuses on Species, Habitat and People.

As a global union of States, scientific commissions, and specialist groups, we mobilize IUCN's networks to scale conservation initiatives, through capacity building and knowledge development. Our conservation initiatives support implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, regional and national biodiversity policies and species-specific priorities. IUCN Save Our Species projects also tackle urgent issues such as climate change, poverty, and food and water security, contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Our objectives and commitments to each of the IUCN Save Our Species pillars are:

SPECIES

We are working to achieve a decline in target threatened species from illegal killing and human wildlife conflict by 2030; and see it halted by 2050.

HABITAT

We aim to ensure the loss, fragmentation and degradation of threatened species' habitats is reduced by 2030 and halted by 2050.

PEOPLE

We are working to reduce human pressures on target threatened species by improving local communities' living conditions and providing them with alternative economic activities by 2030.

Managed by IUCN, the IUCN Save Our Species grant-making mechanism was set up in 2010 for the conservation of threatened species as informed by the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™. It identifies and supports the best frontline wildlife conservation projects worldwide that help address the global extinction crisis.

Its objective is to ensure the long-term survival of threatened species, their habitats and the people who depend on them.

GIBBONS: ASIA'S HIGHLY THREATENED SMALL APES

Gibbons are small apes comprising a total of 20 species, all endemic to South and Southeast Asia. They form the taxonomical family of Hylobatidae, which includes four genera groups.

They are found throughout the Indo-Malayan region, living across ten countries in Asia, namely India, Myanmar, China, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Thailand, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Vietnam and Cambodia, mainly in tropical evergreen rainforests.

Gibbons are one of the most threatened families of primates globally; of the 20 species of gibbons, they are classified as Vulnerable (one species), Endangered (14 species) or Critically Endangered (five species) according to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™, which means they are all facing an imminent risk of extinction.

Gibbons play a vital role in maintaining forest health: as fruits are a prominent part of their diet, they disperse seeds throughout their ecosystem. As many people depend on the same forests for their livelihoods, they are also highly dependent on gibbon conservation.

Gibbons also hold cultural importance for communities living in the range countries for these Great Apes. For example, in Myanmar, some communities see Gibbons as important for their village's spiritual health. While Taoists in China ascribed occult properties to gibbons, believing them to be able to live for several hundred years and to turn into humans[1].

1/ Thomas Geissmann: *"Gibbon paintings in China, Japan, and Korea: Historical distribution, production rate and context"*. Gibbon Journal Nr. 4 – 2008 1

GIBBONS ARE MAINLY THREATENED BY:

HABITAT DESTRUCTION AND FRAGMENTATION

The habitats of gibbons are disappearing due to high levels of deforestation, conversion of existing forest lands for palm oil and other commercial plantations. Illegal agricultural development is also taking place in protected areas, which are supposed to be safe havens for species.

HUNTING AND POACHING

Hunting of gibbons for subsistence and traditional medicines. Hunting pressure varies across the range, but poaching takes place within protected areas where it is illegal.

PET TRADE

This is characterised by the opportunistic live capture of young gibbons (most vulnerable) and their sale as pets in markets and increasingly online using social media. The general lack of awareness by the public of the illegal nature of this activity, and inefficient enforcement of wildlife protection and wildlife trade regulations could be responsible for fuelling the pet trade.

Even though gibbons face the same level of threats as other primates, conservation efforts and funding for gibbon conservation has only seen a fraction of the resources invested in the conservation of other great ape species. Gibbons can be considered as the forgotten apes when conservation resource mobilisation is concerned, as funding has been insufficient to carry out meaningful conservation action.

Furthermore, no global conservation plan for gibbons currently exists, although national and species action plans are being implemented for some species and geographic locations.

THE SOS GIBBONS INITIATIVE

SOS GIBBONS

IUCN Save Our Species launched the SOS Gibbons initiative in February 2019. Funded by a private foundation from the Netherlands, the four-year initiative seeks to catalyse conservation action for some of the most threatened gibbon species mainly through the provision of grants to civil society organisations working on the frontline of conservation. Aiming to improve the long-term survival of gibbon species, activities included conservation action on the ground, conservation planning to determine national priorities, support of knowledge transfer of experiences among conservationists as well as communications activities to raise public awareness on the holistic benefit of conserving gibbons.

The SOS Gibbons initiative benefitted from the support and technical expertise of the IUCN Species Survival Commission Primate Specialist Group and in particular the Section on Small Apes.

OUR IMPACT

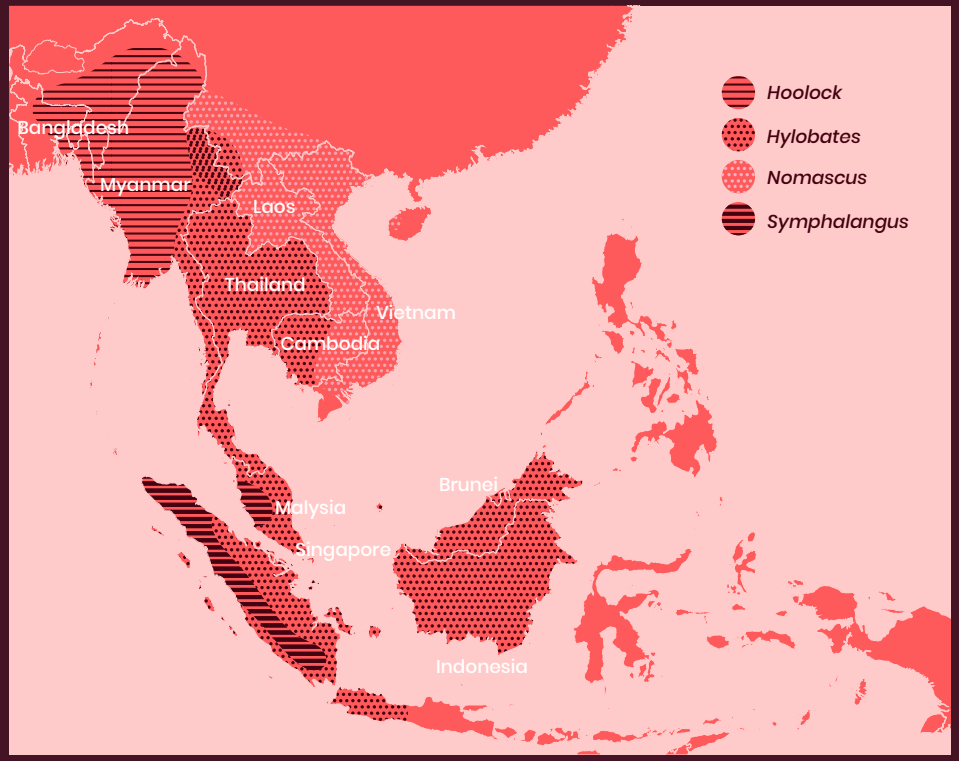
445,921 CHF INVESTED ACROSS FOUR COUNTRIES

111,480 CHF AVERAGE GRANT-SIZE

4 DIFFERENT GIBBON SPECIES

4 PROJECTS

GIBBON SPECIES DISTRIBUTION




© Noor Ali/IUCN


© Alex McWilliam/IUCN

In order to effectively carry out effective conservation action for threatened gibbon species, IUCN Save Our Species used a competitive process involving a call for proposals advertised to a global conservation community. The intended objective was to prevent the extinction of selected gibbon species, protect their habitats and help the local communities that depend on them for survival.

Support to these projects increased the capacity of civil society organisations and local community groups in tackling species extinction.

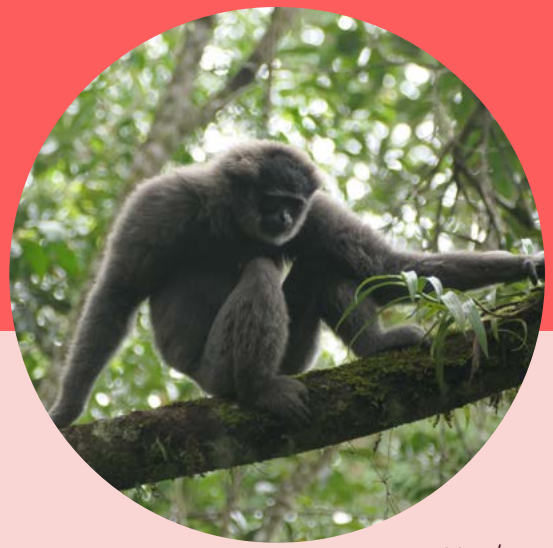
Conservation of the Javan Silvery Gibbon (*Hylobates moloch*) through rehabilitation and reintroduction of the species combined with habitat protection

Country:
Indonesia

Grant Award:
CHF 87,459

Organisation:
The Aspinall Foundation

Project Duration:
24 months



© Alex McWilliam/IUCN

The Javan Silvery Gibbon project was undertaken by supporting collaborative protection of Mount Tilu Nature Reserve and surrounding forest fragments. This also included reinforcement of the gibbon population by releasing gibbons from The Aspinall Foundation's Javan Primate Rehabilitation Centre in West Java. This project's aim was to re-establish a viable and self-sustaining Silvery Gibbon population in the Mount Tilu Nature Reserve.

Initial surveys estimated an existing population of 42 gibbons, and with earlier releases in the area amounted to an additional 33 releases, suggesting a total of 75 gibbons at the start of the project. Without factoring in changes from births and deaths project activities increased the population size by 24%.

Result 1
Quarantine and pre-release screening completed

The quarantine and pre-release screening activities were completed for gibbons at the Javan Primate Rehabilitation Centre. During the project period, 16 wild-born gibbons confiscated from the illegal pet trade, were received at the Javan Primate Rehabilitation Centre and 14 wild-born gibbons, from a combination of new arrivals and gibbons already at the Centre, completed the quarantine period and medical checks prior to transfer to socialisation cages. In total, 19 gibbons went through the pre-release phase prior to transfer to release site and spent time in the socialisation cages to change their diet, behaviour and promote successful pairing.

Result 2
Release site prepared

Two habituation cages and release camps were built in two release sites, Gamboeng and Dewata at Mount Tilu Nature Reserve. The camps are used for daily monitoring for the team and students and researchers, monitoring the Javan gibbons in the habituation enclosures pre-release, for release events, for post-release monitoring and for patrols team to use as a basecamp.

Release camps were also set up at the two main release and monitoring sites and kept supplied as necessary.

The project established a flying camp for the monitoring team to follow the gibbons when they move further away from the release sites to help ensure efficient use of the time spent reaching the position of the gibbons.

Result 3
Gibbons complete habituation phase at release site and are released

18 gibbons completed a habituation phase at the Mount Tilu Nature Reserve release site and were released.

Result 4
Post release monitoring carried out

Post-release monitoring was carried out in addition to regular patrols that improved the security of the reserve, provided opportunities to engage with local communities, and allowed the team to carry out other duties within the reserve.

60% of the gibbons released during the project period were monitored in excess of six months and the remainder were monitored for as long as possible. All the gibbons accessible to the monitoring teams, including those released prior to the project starting, were monitored daily.

Result 5
Education and awareness programmes carried out

Despite the effects of the coronavirus pandemic, teams managed to host 25 conservation awareness activities, aimed mainly for university students. Support was also provided to 110 volunteers composed of 80 university students from various universities in Indonesia, eight local people and 22 students.

IMPACT DATA

24% Population increase from rehabilitated and reintroduced gibbons at the Mount Tilu Nature Reserve

2 Habituation and release camps built in Mount Tilu Nature Reserve

16 Wild born gibbons confiscated from the illegal pet trade rehabilitated

Lessons Learned

The following aspects of this project are adding to, or reinforcing, existing knowledge:

► **Post release monitoring remains a critical element of gibbon conservation.** The monitoring during this project has reinforced that principle for several reasons, including:

- It is only by monitoring primates post release that it is possible to evaluate the success of the project;
- While not all released gibbons can be monitored daily, it does provide the opportunity to learn about released gibbons in need of assistance. During the project this led to the re-capture and treatment of three gibbons, two of which benefitted from medical intervention and were re-released.

► **Recruiting local people, including ex-hunters brings effective impacts for campaigns against hunting and other threat activities.** They are credible as ambassadors to minimize and eliminate hunting and other threats in the area and can become an example in the villages who see the change from hunter to hero.

► **Local community involvement through the Mount Tilu Community Ranger Programme, created in 2021, is important.** Continued support through raising the capacity of the members by a series of training modules in the future would be beneficial.

► **The monogamous social structure of gibbons results in family groups and bonded pairs, with defined territories.** Whether returning wild-born gibbons, taken from the wild at a young age, or introducing captive-bred individuals, there is a period during which the newly released animals must not only adjust to a new environment, but also establish territories and relationships. It is during this early stage of the process that they may learn hard lessons through their interactions with resident populations. Post-release monitoring not only enables an understanding of this process better, but also mitigation of any negative interactions if necessary.

► **Some of the pairs that have been released are splitting in the wild.** The cause is most often that the males are being attracted by wild females. During this project period three of the pairs released split, although one of the females who was recaptured for medical treatment was subsequently paired with another male, and post release their bond has remained strong.

► **Acupuncture on Javan Silvery Gibbons to provide alternative treatment for trauma relating to reducing pain has proven effective.** This method has proven beneficial in selected candidates thus reducing the need for sedation.

► **There may be possible implications of climate change on future releases.** Javan Silvery Gibbons are not released during the rainy season as they are much less active in poor weather. During the project period the rainy season lasted longer and, if this becomes a more regular weather pattern, the timeframe for future releases may be shortened.

© Alex McWilliam/IUCN

Securing corridors to connect populations of Northern White-cheeked Gibbon (*Nomascus leucogenys*) across the landscape of Nam Et-Phou Louey National Park

Country:
Lao Peoples Democratic Republic

Organisation:
Wildlife Conservation Society Lao PDR

Grant Award:
CHF 129,998

Project Duration:
24 months

© Eric Kilby

There are two primary corridors which connect the otherwise fragmented shape of Nam Et-Phou Louey National Park (NEPL NP). These are referred to as *The Western Corridor*, connecting the northwest of NEPL NP to the southwest, and *The Eastern Corridor*, connecting the west of NEPL NP to the east. Through this project, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) Lao PDR increased patrolling in these corridors to protect habitats for safe migration of the species. This project aims to increase the long-term viability of populations of the Northern White-cheeked Gibbons in the NEPL NP in Northern Laos through increasing the protection and integrity of key habitat corridors within NEPL NP.

From a 2021 survey, the population was found to be present in 43% of surveyed habitat. The surveyed area of 89,000 ha represented about 30% of potential habitat of the park which may be about 130,000 ha but the population exists discontinuously across this area. The project undeniably helped in making this 130,000 ha more continuous and ultimately larger.

All enforcement of Lao laws concerning natural resources and protected area by national park law enforcement teams follow a Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC)[2] process, both in the drafting and implementation of the laws themselves and in the formation of national park law enforcement teams. A revision of the current NEPL NP regulations was completed during this project period through a full FPIC process. The regulations were finally approved by all ten districts and form a part of the current outreach and awareness campaign being held in 50 villages around NEPL NP.

Result 1

Enhanced habitat connectivity for gibbons between the eastern and western sectors of NEPL NP

Connectivity between forest habitat, safe for the passage of the species between the eastern and western sectors of NEPL NP, has been enhanced.

Clear demarcation of the national park's Totally Protected Zone (TPZ) boundaries for all travellers and local users of the road through *The Eastern Corridor* of the NEPL NP has been made possible with two gates constructed on either end of the corridor. This draws attention to the park and corridor's existence with no ambiguity regarding its location and boundaries. Regular law enforcement presence across *The Eastern Corridor* has deterred illegal exploitation inside the TPZ (particularly in the corridors).

Result 2

Enhanced habitat connectivity for gibbons between the north-western and southern sectors of NEPL NP

Habitat connectivity was improved for the passage of species between the north-western and southern sectors of NEPL NP.

Clear demarcation of the parks TPZ boundaries was secured with obvious road entrances for people travelling through the park.

The project also resulted in prolonged regular patrol frequency of the corridors, resulting in some deterrence to hunting and habitat encroachment.

2/ Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) is a specific right granted to Indigenous Peoples recognised in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which aligns with their universal right to self-determination. FPIC allows Indigenous Peoples to provide or withhold/ withdraw consent, at any point, regarding projects impacting their territories. FPIC allows Indigenous Peoples to engage in negotiations to shape the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of projects. (Food & Agricultural Organisastion (FAO), 2023)

IMPACT DATA

- **Improved habitat connectivity for gibbons over an area of 130,000 ha**
- **A grievance mechanism was established in all villages to allow them to report any potential abuse of authority**
- **Increased mobile forest patrols through ecological corridors resulted in deterrence to hunting and encroachment of forest.**


© Alex McWilliam/IUCN


© Alex McWilliam/IUCN

Lessons Learned

Increases in encounters can have both a positive or a negative result. More threats encountered could be the result of more effective operations, or an increase in pressure from external drivers such as COVID-19.

Two overarching strategy principals that continue to provide the park management unit a pragmatic way of working toward their goals are as follows:

1. Diversification in strategy and activities, covering not just natural resource protection but also data-driven monitoring, community outreach, livelihood alternatives, and political negotiation at local and national levels.

2. Adaptive management, driven by ongoing monthly meetings and regular monitoring in tandem with a 10-year strategic management plan and a flexible five-year implementation plan.

There is a threshold level of patrolling intensity to be reached before deterrence can be achieved and threats reduced. Regular patrolling of a small area around the sub-station and on the river resulted in a relatively low level of poaching and a subsequent increase in fauna populations was observed on the river.

There are great benefits to be had in strategy, motivation, and ultimate effectiveness of ranger patrolling by not relying entirely on sub-station-based teams. It was found that by managing teams out of a central office, providing greater benefits and more time at home, motivation of individual rangers was greatly improved as was their ability to be more flexible and strategic in their patrolling, and ultimately more effective. The best practice is to have a mix of permanent protection at key biodiversity hotspot areas supported by a more flexible component through the mobile ranger teams.

The national park's inability to prosecute cases at the rate they are created is resulting in an ever-growing backlog of pending cases. A specialist was hired to work with the prosecution team to improve case and offender information management and find other ways to make the process more efficient and effective.

Long-term conservation of the Northern Yellow-cheeked Crested Gibbon (*Nomascus annamensis*) in Northeast Cambodia, securing a global stronghold

Country:
Cambodia

Grant Award:
CHF 129,821

Organisation:
Conservation International Greater Mekong

Project Duration:
24 months

© Santiago Cassalett

Working with park authorities, rangers, and community members adjacent to the park, Conservation International sought to create the local drive and know-how for conservation of the park that will secure bright futures for both the people and the gibbons who rely on it. The project's aim was to maintain a stable gibbon population in the park, reduce forest loss by 50%, enhance law enforcement in the park, and support community-based ecotourism enterprises.

As part of efforts to complete zonation of Veun Sai Siam Pang National Park (VSSS NP), the project team conducted land use mapping with communities, developing sketch maps of the landscape, identifying land cover and use types. This will be used to accurately inform the government of current community land use, thus effectively giving the community a voice in the government zoning process.

Based on forest cover data (Global Forest Watch 2016–2020) the average annual forest loss was 0.44% prior to the start of the project while data for 2020–2022 showed that this was reduced to 0.23%. Similarly, analysis of 2022 gibbon survey data estimated approximately 240 groups or 962 individuals. Compared to previous work, this indicates a stable or growing population.

Result 1

Law enforcement and management improved by the end of the project through the zonation of VSSP NP, the development of an adaptive management plan and the monthly patrolling of ranger teams

The project supported 23 rangers to substantially improve law enforcement and management in VSSS NP and collect data used to support targeted patrols in 'hotspot' areas of illegal activity.

The rangers were trained in the use of data collection tools and methods such as SMART and other related technologies. This improved the effectiveness of ranger patrols resulting in the confiscation and removal of a significant number of illegal hunting and logging camps and poaching equipment as well as intercepting illegal activities as they occur. They reported approximately 1,080 incidents addressed through 579 patrols covering 18,474 km.

Result 2

Conservation-based livelihoods will be improved through the increase of future tourist revenue through expansion of scope and overall improvement of gibbon-based Competency-Based Education & Training (CBET) and securing access to customary resources for five communities

A community-based eco-tourism venture was established to provide a conservation-based livelihood for community members in VSSP NP. The site has generated just over 35,000 USD for the community since it was established more than six years ago and continues to operate. Over a period of two and a half months the site had almost as many tour groups as it did the whole of the previous year, indicating an increase following COVID-19 restriction. In addition, a community benefit sharing mechanism was established that included a Community Based Organisation bank account and a small loans and lending scheme.

Access to and understanding of customary resources in VSSP NP improved for five communities composed of 715 families.

IMPACT DATA

- **Maintained a stable gibbon species population in the Veun Sai Siam Pang National Park**
- **Support to rangers led to approximately 1,080 incidents addressed by 579 patrols covering 18,474 km**
- **Deforestation was limited to an annual rate of 0.23% compared to a national rate of 1.8%**
- **A community-based ecotourism venture was improved to support a conservation based livelihood for community members around VSSP NP.**

Lessons Learned

Being adaptive and having the ability to pivot when things are not working is essential. When the pandemic shut down a significant amount of field operations, the team's relationships and close communication with project partners and communities was critical in ensuring that whatever activities could be done were, and any adjustments to project implementation could be planned for.

Establishing long-term monitoring programmes, should be considered critical for conservation programmes. The project began conducting protected area wide gibbon surveys in 2010, and now has over a decade of longitudinal data that is essential for understanding and monitoring the population trends of this species.

Consolidating and enhancing sustainable, transboundary conservation of the Critically Endangered Cao-vit Gibbon (*Nomascus nasutus*)

Country:
Vietnam

Grant Award:
CHF 98,643

Organisation:
Fauna & Flora International

Project Duration:
24 months

© Zhao Chao

There was need to minimize human impacts on Cao-vit Gibbon habitat though community engagement and empowerment; enhance law enforcement and monitoring capacity of the protected area and lead by the community; and to develop coordinated measures for gibbon habitat and species conservation. The Cao-vit Gibbon population in Trung Khanh of Vietnam (and Bangliang of China) is the only population left in the world. The project's aim was to protect Cao-vit Gibbon populations and reducing key threats to the species; improve protected area management capacity and international cooperation; develop a Species Conservation Action Plan for Cao-Vit Gibbon; and strengthen community engagement in Cao-vit Gibbon conservation.

The project revised the Cao-vit Gibbon Species Conservation Action Plan for the period of 2021-2030 with a vision to 2050. The Plan was endorsed and shared, providing a roadmap, and international best practice for expanding the population and range, while improving its resilience to climate change. It is now translated into Vietnamese and Chinese and serves as significant guidance for any conservation actors working in Vietnam and China. In China, the action plan has been used by the Bangliang national nature reserve management board of China to mobilize investment from the Chinese government. In Vietnam, the Department of Agriculture and Development of Cao Bang province has used the plan as a reference in decision-making related to the protected area. This involved 12 villages with the participation of a total of 958 local people.

Result 1

The Cao-vit Gibbon (CVG) population in the CVG Species and Habitat Conservation Area (SHCA) remains stable, or has grown, after two years

The project secured the continuation of Gibbon Conservation Teams to monitor the CVG population, keep eyes on forest habitat, and support law enforcement. No evidence of hunting gibbons was recorded and or reported and the presence of gibbon infants was recorded. This strongly confirms the gibbon population in Trung Khanh has remained at least stable over the last two years.

Enhanced capacity of two rangers and all ten Gibbon Conservation Team members. The team patrolled the forest with a focus on monitoring threats to wildlife and gibbon monitoring and were well trained on wildlife protection laws, forest patrolling and gibbon monitoring skills. They conducted a total of 2,632 patroller days (13,868 hours) covering 36,119 km in total distance.

Support to the monitoring team also included the repair of two ranger stations in the north and south of the SHCA, Lung Day station and Kha Min station, to better support gibbon research and monitoring across the whole area.

Result 2

Improved capacity for protected area management and international cooperation for CVG conservation

The project improved protected area management including maintaining the continued cooperation between relevant authorities in Vietnam and China. The project organized two online transboundary workshops between the two protected areas, where participants discussed transboundary conservation issues and planned for the population survey.

The project collected information on land use and conducted a socio-economic information survey in support for the expansion and upgrading of the CVG SHCA to a nature reserve. In particular, the project also conducted a series of consultation meetings at 12 villages in the proposed protected area extension zone from 2020–2022 to inform the Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) process and identify key stakeholders who will engage in FPIC process.

A feasibility study was developed to expand and upgrade the SHCA. The proposed expansion boundary was developed in consultation with the community. If approved, this proposal will add an

additional 4,320 hectares southwest of the current protected area to the existing protected gibbon habitat and the expanded SHCA will be 5,977 hectares in total size.

The project continued to support the FPIC process with stakeholders, communities and villages, regarding the boundary, management structure and plan. The project has supported and maintained the operation of Management Advisory Committee to empower the local community to be part of protected area management and decision making.

Result 3

Improved the enabling conditions for Cao-vit Gibbon conservation with the Conservation Action Plan (CAP) 2020-2024

An independent review and evaluation of forest recovery and assisted natural regeneration (ANR) in the CVG SHCA to date was completed. The researchers still recommended ANR as a way of promoting tree species that can provide food trees, and serve as sleeping, resting or singing trees. However, future ANR activities need to better identify beneficial tree species and ensure their seedlings grow to sufficient height so as not to be shaded out by grass before planting.

Result 4

Community engagement in protected area management is maintained and strengthened, and communities are benefiting from CVG conservation

To reduce anthropogenic forest degradation and further local support the project continued supporting improved livelihoods initiatives, including pilot fruit tree nurseries and cow husbandry.

To reduce negative impacts by local communities on the forest and allow local communities to augment their income and reduce the need to collect forest resources or conduct agricultural activities within the SHCA, a range of livelihood support activities were implemented.

- As cattle grazing was previously identified as a threat to the CVG conservation (through disturbance and vegetation clearance), households with goats were encouraged to switch to different livestock species such as water buffalo and provided with husbandry trainings. In addition, elephant grass planting was funded to produce alternative/cultivated livestock feed to disincentivize cattle-owning households from releasing their livestock into the SHCA;

- Households were provided with trainings and seedlings to grow lemongrass, and other fruit trees to generate additional income;

- Selected community members were also involved in forest planting in previously degraded area and nursery work, from which they gained direct income. 2,600 Cao-vit Gibbon food trees and 400 blood plum trees sourced from two project-supported nurseries, were planted;

- Finally, a loan scheme was set up to finance livelihood initiatives for several households.

After two years, two knowledge-attitudes-behaviour (KAB) surveys to document changes in the local knowledge, attitude and perceptions towards wildlife and Cao-vit Gibbon conservation were conducted. In the most recent two KAB surveys carried out in 2022, 86% of the 214 respondents reported having income from livestock husbandry, which was a 35% increase from 2020. This indicated that this initiative was effective and generated additional income for local households. Similarly, 12.7% of the total 315 respondents reported that their household income had increased by at least 10%. In September 2020, two nurseries were established in close to the habitat restoration areas. More than 2,600 Cao-vit Gibbon food trees were planted in Lan valley to create a forested habitat corridor to improve habitat quality and connectivity between the existing SHCA forest with the proposed expansion areas.
An outdoor environmental education training course was conducted with the participation of 18 teachers; five Gibbon Conservation Team members and two Forest Department staff. Participants (trainees) of this course then implemented a day-long activity called "Junior Ranger" for 106 students and 28 teachers in Trung Khanh, Cao Bang where students learned about the biodiversity of the local forest and experienced a day as a ranger. The project provided 80 wildlife photos and 100 books about conservation and biodiversity protection for two Green Libraries in Ngoc Khe and Phong Nam secondary schools in the SHCA buffer zone.

IMPACT DATA

- **The project developed the Cao-vit Gibbon Species Conservation Action Plan for the period 2021-2030 with inputs from multiple sections in China and Vietnam.**
- **Patrol teams were well trained on wildlife protection laws, forest patrolling and gibbon monitoring skills and conducted a total of 2,632 patroller days (13,868 hours) covering 36,119 km in total distance**
- **The project collected information on land use and socio-economic information survey in support for the expansion and upgrading of the CVG SHCA to a nature reserve**
- **Knowledge-attitudes-behaviour surveys showed 86% of respondents reported having income from livestock husbandry, which was a 35% increase from before the project**


© Noor Ali/IUCN

© FFI Vietnam

Lessons Learned

Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)[3] is extremely important to ensure that project activities involve local communities and do not create conflicts. Particularly in cases where project activities could impact communities' ability to exercise their right to use resources, FPIC will help bring communities' voices to decision-making levels.

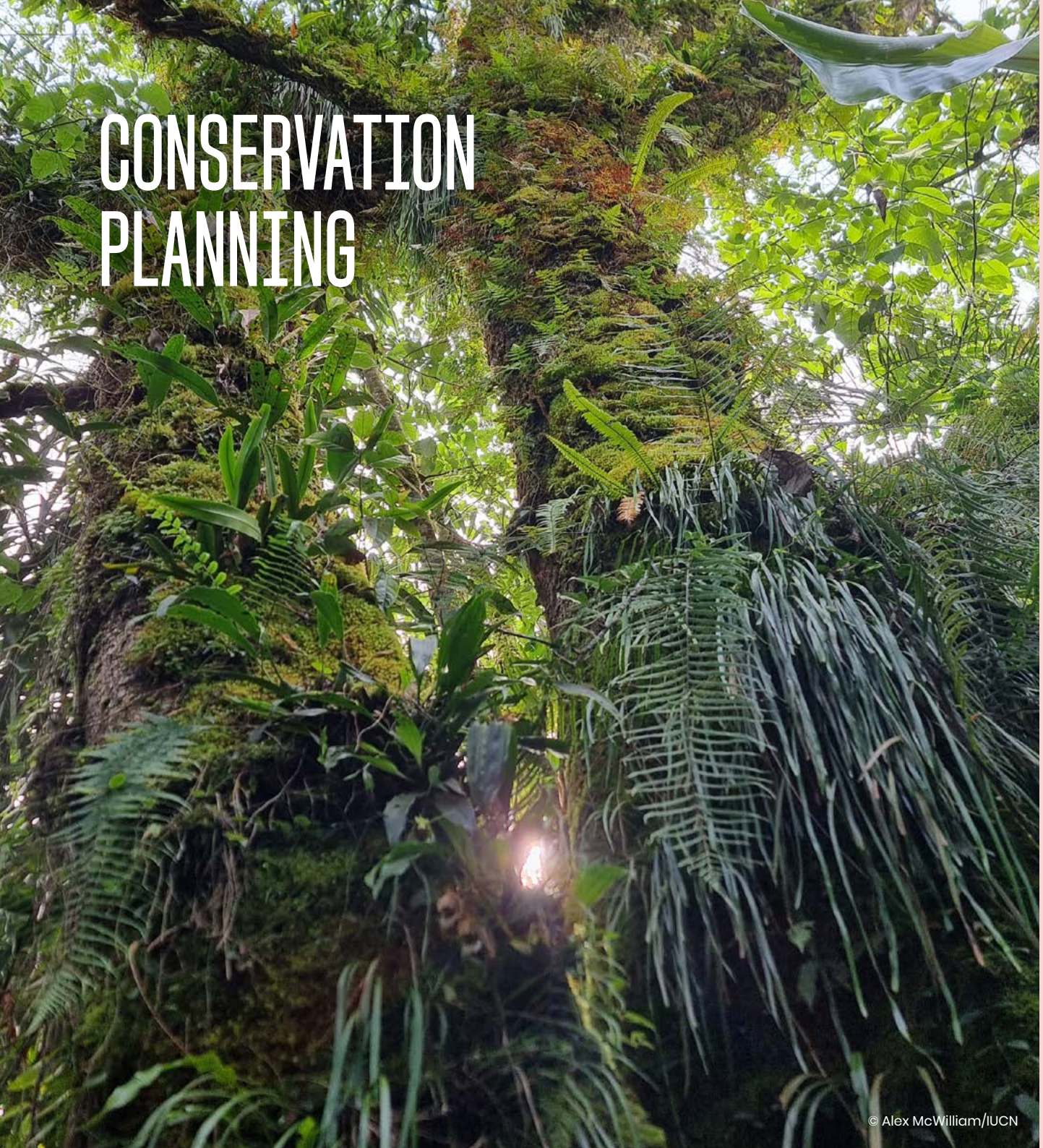
It is difficult to observe gibbons in dense forest habitats using traditional ground-based methods, making it challenging to estimate group sizes and population sizes. New technologies are beginning to circumvent the problems associated with traditional methods e.g. use of a highly portable unoccupied aerial vehicle (UAV), equipped with thermal and standard (RGB) cameras. Due to their demonstrated usefulness, we anticipate more widespread use of UAVs in the study of gibbons and other threatened species, leading to a more robust evidence-base for their conservation.

The use of thermal drones in monitoring and surveying Cao-vit Gibbons. The pilot was successful, showing that thermal drones can be used for quickly identifying gibbon locations and counting the number of individuals as hot-blooded bodies are easily distinguishable against cooler vegetation cover on the thermal camera.

Communications and outreach activities continue to play an important role in achieving project goals. Not only have village meetings and gibbon pride festivals raised the local awareness of the imperilled status of the Cao-vit Gibbons and the need to protect this species, but they also served as platforms for community members to provide their feedback for the project activities and allow the project to refine its approach to locally led conservation.

3/ Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) is a specific right granted to Indigenous Peoples recognised in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which aligns with their universal right to self-determination. FPIC allows Indigenous Peoples to provide or withhold/ withdraw consent, at any point, regarding projects impacting their territories. FPIC allows Indigenous Peoples to engage in negotiations to shape the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of projects. (Food & Agricultural Organisastion (FAO), 2023)

CONSERVATION PLANNING



© Alex McWilliam/IUCN

Conservation planning plays a vital role in safeguarding the future of threatened gibbon species. Conservation planning for these charismatic creatures involves a multi-faceted approach that integrates scientific research, habitat protection, community engagement, and policy implementation. By addressing the complex challenges faced by gibbon species, conservation planners strive to secure their survival, restore degraded habitats, and promote sustainable practices to ensure a harmonious coexistence between gibbons and their human counterparts.

While funding and conservation priorities are clear for some countries where gibbons occur, Malaysia and Indonesia do not have established national conservation action plans. It was important that these plans be developed to serve as strong frameworks for conservation interventions before funds can be dispersed effectively in these two countries. Through the SOS Gibbons initiative, two action plans were developed for Malaysia and Indonesia, providing a strategic approach on how to conserve gibbons at the national level. They identified the range of organisations and individuals to involve in the process, considered the social, political and cultural environments in which conservation actions may be taken, and include consideration of the resources, risks, priorities and other aspects of implementation. They were produced in collaboration with the IUCN Species Survival Commission Primate Specialist Group and the Section on Small Apes.

NATIONAL GIBBON ACTION PLANS IN INDONESIA

The vision of this action plan is to support the realization of population and habitat sustainability of gibbons in Indonesia through species and habitat protection, as well as anticipating and mitigating threats collaboratively.

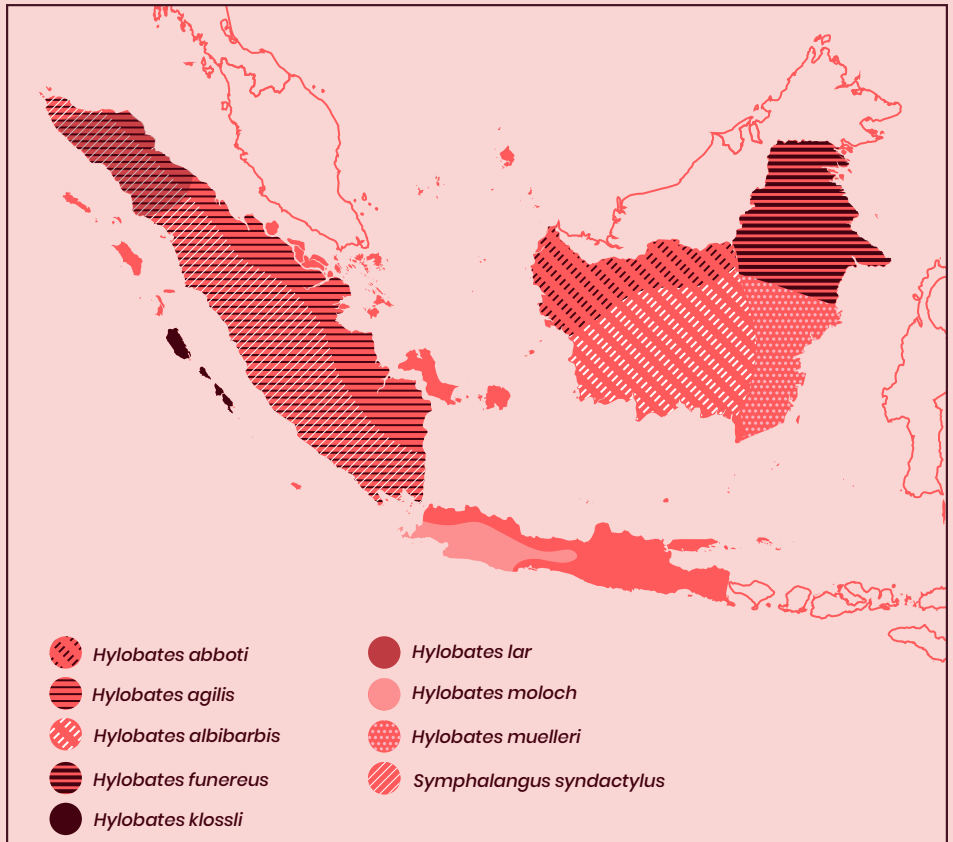
The creation of a roadmap for the conservation of gibbons in Indonesia is to serve as a reference and guide for parties to support the achievement of this vision through the following four missions:

1/ Maintain the long-term viability of the species by maintaining and increasing populations and habitats through partnerships and inclusion into the development agenda.

2/ Increase the institutional capacity and human resources required to support the effectiveness of population and habitat protection, and provide positive impacts that are in line with sustainable development.

3/ Create sustainable impacts on populations and habitats of Indonesian gibbons through strengthening databases, developing science, law enforcement, sustainable funding, and increasing public support.

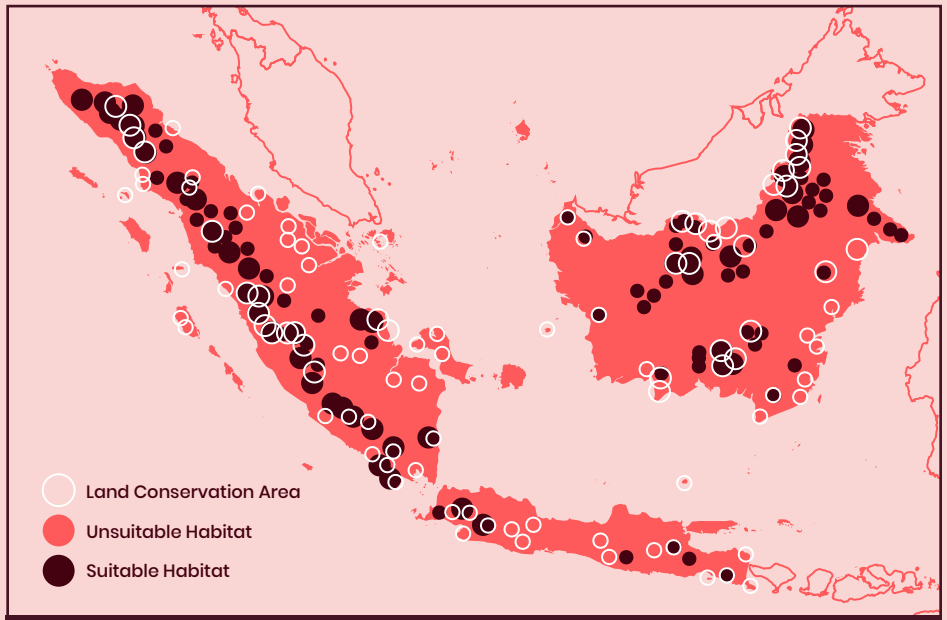
4/ Ensure the implementation of Indonesia's gibbon ex-situ conservation programs, including rehabilitation and release programs to support the success of in-situ conservation management.



AREA COVERAGE OF GIBBON AND SIAMANG SPECIES IN INDONESIA

This document recommends conservation activities over the next ten years (2024-2034), based on the latest information and discussions from 2020 to 2021 with experts and observers of Indonesian gibbons. It is supplemented with information from an analysis of the interconnection of issues that affect, priority activities and budget within the first three years and that can be used by all stakeholders.

Indonesia has 45% of the world's species of gibbon (Hylobatidae), with nine species of gibbon spread across Kalimantan, Sumatra, and in Java. There is a population that is scattered in the conservation area, with most of the population being outside the conservation area which is not fully protected.



PRIORITY LANDSCAPE FOR GIBBON SPECIES IN INDONESIA

To ensure a future for all nine Indonesian small apes, several actions are essential.

► Mitigation of threats to species and habitats inside and outside conservation areas including connectivity between corridors and forest canopy while ensuring suitable habitat with appropriate food species;

► Increasing the capacity of the public and stakeholders through training, education and awareness;

► Strengthening regulations related to the protection of the habitat and species populations;

► Developmentment of science to support species conservation;

► Promote sustainable funding for species conservation;

► Strengthening governance of ex-situ conservation including efforts to combat the illegal wildlife trade within Indonesia and across international borders;

► Address possible issues of zoonosis by strengthening knowledge about gibbon health and disease in the wild from the illegal wildlife trade.

Similarly, based on recent information about small ape occurrence in Indonesia, the project identified priority habitats across Indonesia. To facilitate planning, budget estimates were provided for several recommended actions on a national and regional scale to support the overall goals of the action plan, as well as specific site-based actions to be implemented over the next ten years. Many of the recommended actions cannot be achieved without significant efforts by governmental agencies that are tasked with wildlife and habitat management, and cooperation among government agencies. Some of the recommended budget items are intended to support, rather than complete, actions by government agencies. Fully implementing these recommendations will require significant additional funding and time.

NATIONAL GIBBON ACTION PLANS IN MALAYSIA

As part of the consultation process, the Action Plan Inception Workshop was held in 2020 with another two planning meetings held in the same year. A total of 14 regional working group meetings were also held from 2020 to 2021, as well as 25 thematic working group meetings.

The goal of this plan is to mobilize coordinated action by international, national, regional, and local conservation groups, government agencies, research institutions, community organizations and members, and other interested parties to prevent small ape extinctions and protect small apes in ecologically functioning populations.

Malaysia is home to five small ape species, all of which are listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List, primarily because of habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation, with hunting for consumption or the pet trade as a secondary threat. Rapid development in Malaysia over recent decades has resulted in loss of about half of the nation's original forest cover, and forest continues to be lost at a rapid rate. Very little recent information about Malaysian small ape abundance, habitat preferences, behaviour, or ecology is available, and little attention has been paid to their plight.

Recent research shows that small apes perform a vital and irreplaceable function in seed dispersal networks in the forests that they inhabit, such that local extinctions may negatively affect other threatened species, as well as human communities that depend on forest ecosystems.

To ensure a future for Malaysian small apes, several actions are essential:

►Remaining small ape habitats must be protected from further loss and degradation and sustainably managed;

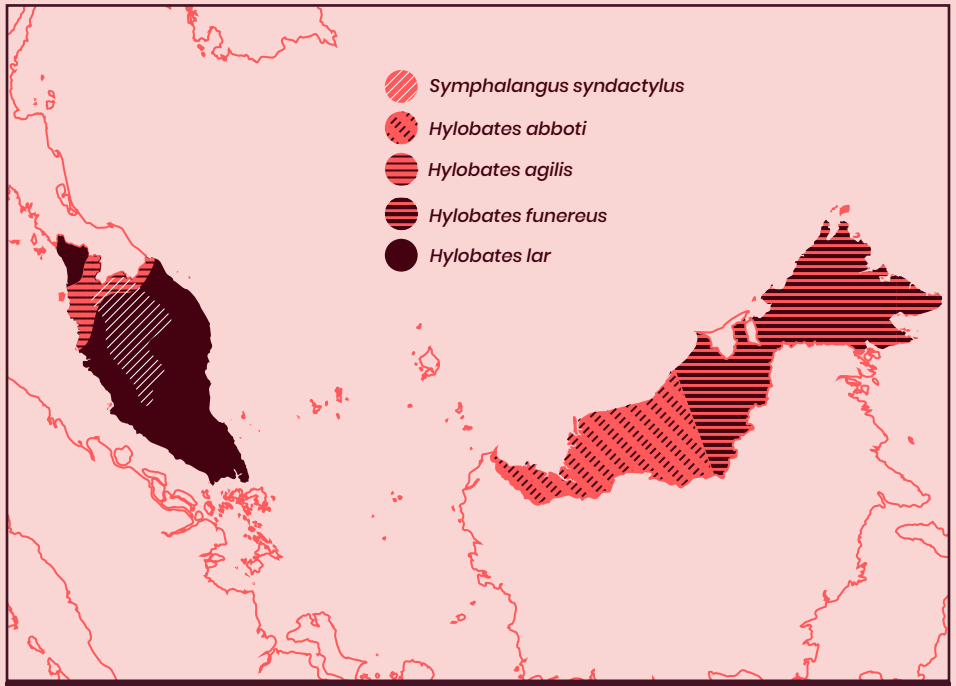
►Retaining the integrity of Malaysia's system of totally protected areas and strengthening protection of priority habitats for small apes is essential to ensuring their persistence in the country;

►Additional necessary actions may include:

- Improving knowledge about the distribution, abundance, demography, and ecological relationships of Malaysian small apes;
- Restoring degraded habitats and enhancing connectivity within and across landscapes;
- Involving local and indigenous people in management of forest resources;
- Advancing capacity to combat illegal trade in small apes;
- Enhancing capacity for small ape rescue, rehabilitation, and reintroduction;
- Enhancing capacity for disease surveillance in small apes;
- Reducing problematic interactions between humans and small apes, including feeding associated with tourism; and
- Raising awareness about small apes and their conservation needs in Malaysia.

Based on recent information about small ape occurrence in Malaysia contributed by governmental and non-governmental agencies and individuals, the project identified priority habitats for small ape conservation across Malaysia. To facilitate planning, budget estimates were provided for several recommended actions on a national scale to support the overall goals of the action plan, as well as specific site-based actions. Many of the recommended actions cannot be achieved without significant efforts by governmental agencies that are tasked with wildlife and habitat management, and cooperation among government agencies. Some of the recommended budget items are intended to support, rather than complete, actions by government agencies. Many of our recommended management actions are intended as, and budgeted to be, exploratory first steps only.

Fully implementing these recommendations will require significant additional funding and time.



PREDICTED DISTRIBUTION FOR SMALL APE SPECIES IN MALAYSIA

Based on the analysis of the threats to small apes, and extensive discussion among participants in the process, several priority actions were identified, including actions that should be implemented on a national scale and site-based actions. The recommended actions are organized into two phases, with the first phase laying the foundation for the second phase of action.

Because of significant data deficiencies that must be addressed, recommendations for Phase 2 actions should be considered provisional and should be reviewed and amended as needed. Phase I recommendations are actions for immediate implementation in the upcoming five years (2023-2028). Actions recommended for Phase II should be planned in detail in during the final year of Phase I for implementation in Phase II (2028-2033).

Recommended actions at a national level include:

► Effective habitat protection and sustainable management;

► Improve knowledge about the distribution, abundance, demography, and ecological relationships of each Malaysian small ape and resolve questions about subspecific taxonomy in Malaysia;

► Restore degraded and fragmented habitats and enhance arboreal connectivity;

► Involve local people in the long-term effective management of forest resources;

► Advance capacity to combat domestic and international small ape trade and trafficking in Malaysia;

► Enhance capacity for small ape rehabilitation and reintroduction in Malaysia;

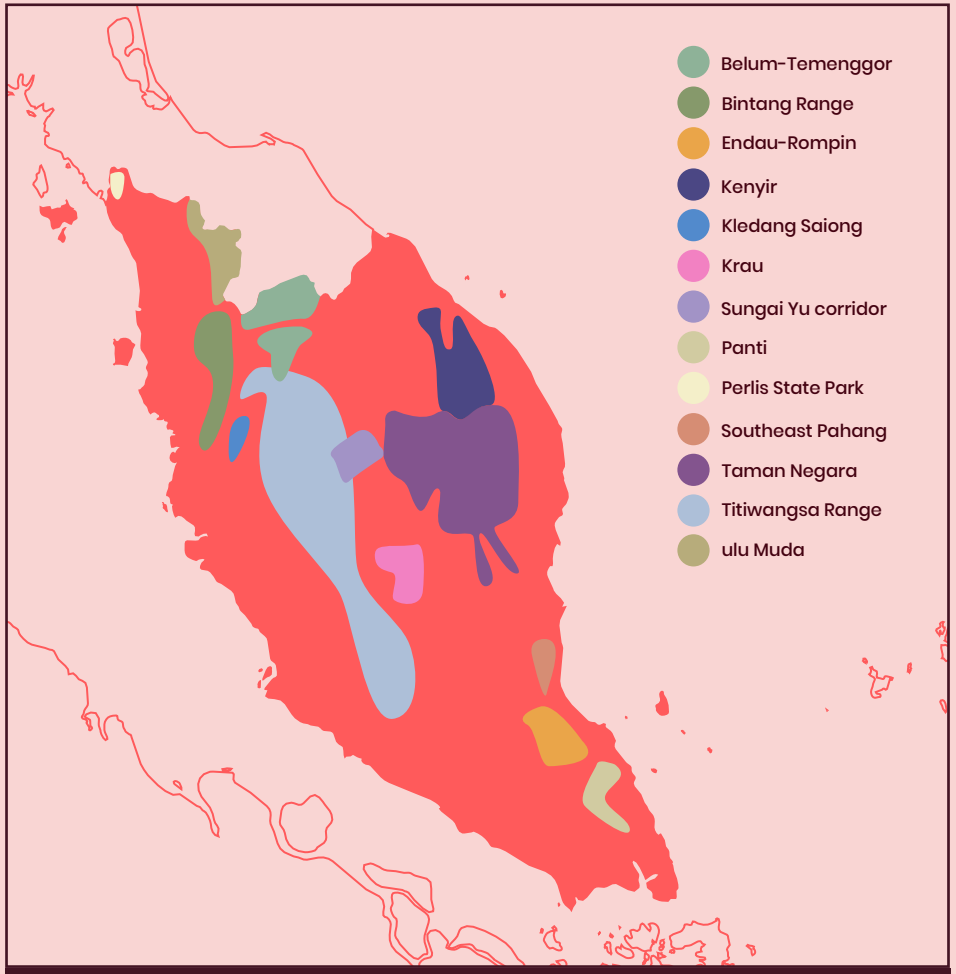
► Enhance capacity for disease surveillance in captive and wild small ape populations;

► Reduce the intensity of problematic human-small ape interfaces in Malaysia;

► Raise awareness about small apes, threats to their persistence, and their importance in Malaysian ecosystems, and monitor and evaluate progress in Malaysian small ape conservation.

The plan also includes specific recommendations and associated objectives in support of these priority actions with candidate priority sites for small ape conservation being identified. Where appropriate, individual sites were grouped into landscapes based on proximity and actual or potential habitat connectivity, and then prioritised.

Priority landscapes for Peninsular Malaysia are identified.



PRIORITY LANDSCAPES FOR SMALL APES IN MALAYSIA

KNOWLEDGE SHARING

© Nguyen Duc Tho FFI

The SOS Gibbons initiative contributed to increasing the capacity of civil society organisations by supporting the exchange of information, experiences and best practices among conservationists. One of the outcomes of this was an increased understanding of the conservation status of gibbons.

One such opportunity was the organisation of a regional workshop in May 2023 that provided a platform for grant recipients, nature conservation organisations and other stakeholders to share examples, case studies and lessons learned from their grant implementation. Through this workshop, participants benefited from sharing successful experiences in threatened species conservation projects and conservation activities more broadly and increased their capacity to address wildlife conservation issues. Species conservation action planning; monitoring gibbons and forest patrolling; habitat assessment, management and restoration; and community engagement were the key themes discussed. The key lessons and best practices are highlighted in the next section.

COVID-19 was a common challenge affecting the development of action plans during the period 2020–2022. The restrictions on gatherings of people, and domestic and international travel, made convenings of experts and other stakeholders extremely difficult. Each process needed to be adapted to utilise online consultation approaches. However, these were reported to be less effective than in-person gatherings and made consultation more time consuming, and cumbersome due to the number needed to reasonably engage all relevant stakeholders.

SPECIES CONSERVATION ACTION PLANNING

Key lessons and best practices:

Key steps and considerations for developing species conservation action plans

- Prepare for the process by assessing the status of previous efforts;
- Establish the vision for the action plan;
- Identify and engage relevant stakeholders to increase the quality of the plan and the readiness to put it into action;
- Collect and review relevant information to understand local context;
- Seek funding support before beginning the process.

Key steps for implementing species conservation action plans

- To implement the plan, develop comprehensive guidelines and an effective implementation plan;
- Establish a methodology suited to local contexts and country needs;
- Plan to conduct an annual review of the priority actions to assess progress;
- Ensure the plan document is available in the local language;
- Involve relevant stakeholders and local communities at all project stages to promote ownership.

Key lessons from developing and utilising action plans

- The development process should be led by expert facilitators and organised to be inclusive in its stakeholder participation. Efforts should be made to prepare stakeholders by providing a brief about the rationale, process, and steps achieved to date;
- The plans should be ambitious but realistic, with well defined action statements that are specific and include details on what, where, by who, and estimated costs to make monitoring and attribution easier;
- Monitoring implementation of any plan must be included in the scope of the plan.

Best practices for engaging governments to adopt plans and incorporate priority actions

- Secure government buy-in by having a clear understanding of their interests, policies and strategies; ensure there is clear alignment with existing government priorities; and clearly secure their commitment for any action plan before starting the development process;
- Recognize limitations of each government agency to execute activities; ensure to convey actions in a plan will help them achieve results that benefit their agenda; and work with the government at the appropriate levels;
- Establish clear communications focal points within all relevant government stakeholder agencies to maximise efficiency and minimize any misunderstandings.

MONITORING GIBBONS

Key considerations for developing a monitoring approach for gibbons (or other similar primates)

- Distinguish approaches between wild and rehabilitated gibbons and have a clear understanding of threats;
- Monitoring should be specific and relevant to addressing the conservation need of the site and species. Define a standardised monitoring approach that considers local situation and available resources;
- Assess the capacity, resources and stakeholders involved to conduct gibbon monitoring;
- Identify sustainable sources of funding and linkages to other initiatives.

FOREST PATROLLING

Key considerations for implementing forest patrolling to address threats to gibbons

- Raise awareness of local communities on the importance of species and pride in the gibbons in their forests. Increase community awareness of the laws, regulations, and responsibilities;
- Increase capacity building for conservationists and government stakeholders by developing specific trainings such as law enforcement, gibbon knowledge, forest knowledge;
- Increase law enforcement capacity by supporting ranger welfare and general codes of conduct for effective patrolling; and developing law enforcement strategies to enhance site protection.

Innovative approaches and tools for forest patrolling

- Enhance monitoring using drones, online camera traps for real time data transmission, and accessing satellite images through global forest watch;
- Consider the use of an incentive mechanism or rewards scheme based on performance of local community rangers.

HABITAT ASSESSMENT, MANAGEMENT AND RESTORATION

Key considerations for developing actions targeting improved management and/or restoration of gibbon habitats

- Good understanding of the protection status (if any) of a site, any available national land use plans. Evaluation of the possibility to create a buffer zone to protect habitats and provide space for species should also be considered;
- Understanding local communities living in an area, the threats to gibbons' habitats, and the drivers and socioeconomic impacts;
- Need to understand potential and appropriate approaches for habitat restoration so as to connect fragmented forest patches or to improve quality.

Best practice tools and guidance

- Referring to expertise and guidance on reforestation and rehabilitation provided by various institutions, including the International Labour Organization; Food and Agriculture Organization; The Forest Restoration and Research Unit at Chiang Mai University; and the People Resources Conservation Foundation, which has guidance on Assisted Natural Regeneration (ANR);
- Use of advanced technologies to help habitat restoration connect wildlife corridors and fragmented habitats;
- Clarifying status of land with all relevant stakeholders;
- Collaboration between different organisations and include local communities.

Main challenges for involving communities and local government in habitat management and/or restoration. How to address these challenges?

- It can be challenging to make good plans and agreements that consider the needs of local communities;
- Most funding is short term while actions required are long term such as monitoring, maintenance support for restoration, community livelihoods, among others;
- Communities can be motivated by supporting them to implement sustainable livelihoods and habitat restoration practices, as well as providing other incentives.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Outreach and awareness

Key considerations for building community awareness on gibbon conservation

- Find a common vision and work with key stakeholders;
- Increase law enforcement capacity by supporting ranger welfare and general codes of conduct for effective patrolling; and developing law enforcement strategies to enhance site protection;
- Identify community needs and develop a good understanding as to how best to communicate with communities and build trust and ownership;
- Learn lessons from previous efforts.

Innovative approaches and tools for community awareness raising

- Visual tools, models and approaches to raise awareness and keep conservation issues present in the minds of local communities;
- Use natural environments as a classroom and use storytelling as a powerful tool;
- Community exchanges between different communities work well;
- Conducting awareness levels surveys;
- Monitoring the impact of community actions;
- Providing external feedback to communities.

© Alex McWilliam/IUCN


© Nguyen Duc Tho FFI

Community livelihoods

Key considerations for developing community livelihood activities to support conservation outcomes

- Consider community livelihood needs and how to build partnerships and relationships to bring in appropriate expertise;
- Review initiatives that deliver conservation outcomes, community benefits while avoiding unintended risks;
- Consider of long-term sustainability, development of markets, price structures, among other factors and how to build local capacity;
- Conduct stakeholder mapping and develop understanding of government development plans as part of development of conservation management plans.

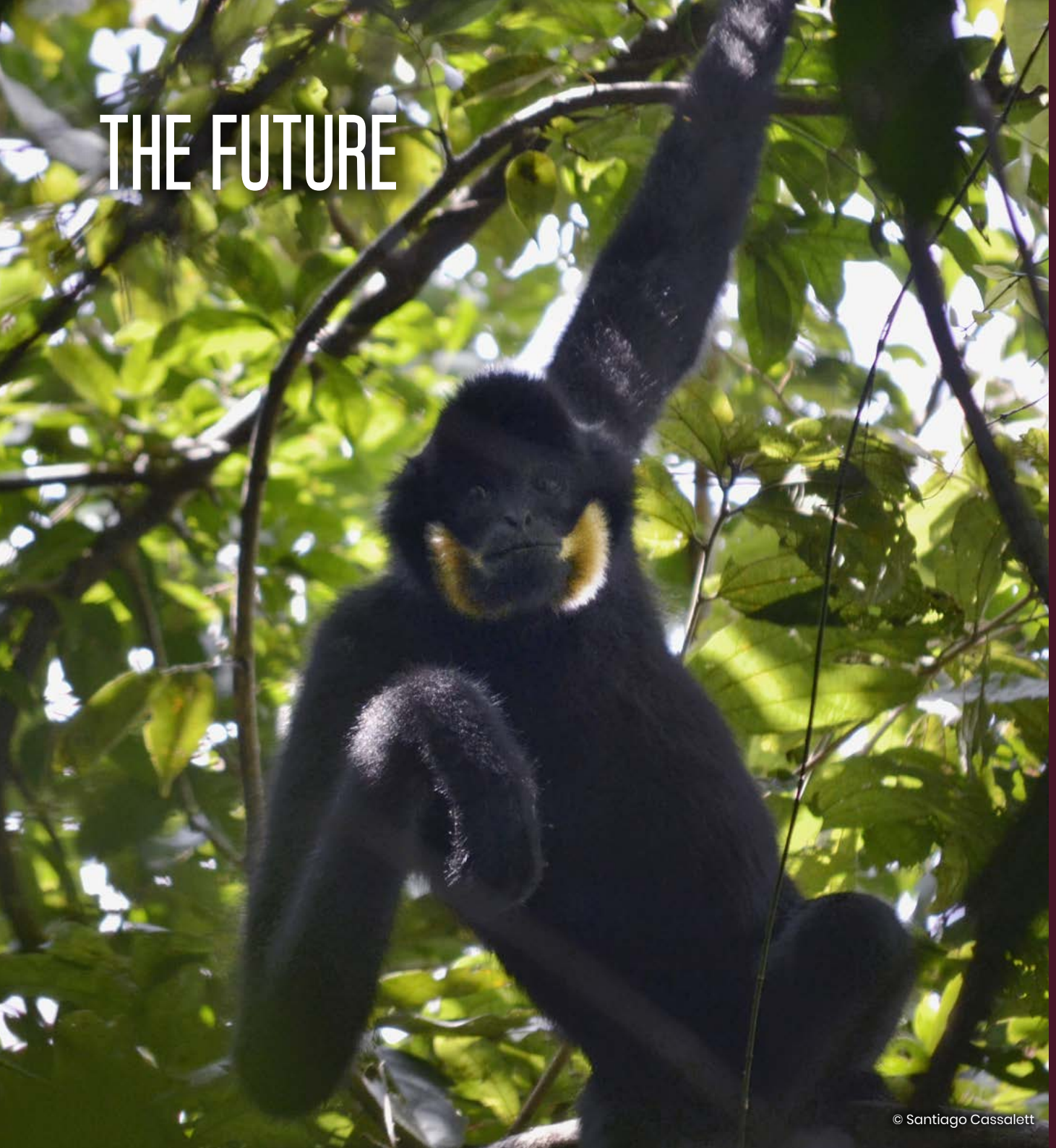
Innovative approaches for supporting livelihoods

- Take advantage of deforestation commodities which are certification schemes that require compliance for a premium price;
- Integrate law enforcement and compliance schemes into livelihood strategies to avoid negative impacts;
- Use social media to enhance communication between potential buyers and sellers;
- Rather than developing new activities, help to improve existing activities.

Key challenges for developing community livelihoods. How to address these challenges?

- It can be challenging to manage community expectations and ensuring they are realistic;
- Maintaining or scaling up interventions to ensure their sustainability may be a challenge;
- The implementation of some interventions has generated unintended consequences that should be anticipated during the planning.

THE FUTURE



© Santiago Cassalett

While significant work has gone into protecting gibbons and their habitats, the threat to their survival still persists. All 20 gibbon species are at the brink of extinction and immediate efforts at international, regional and national levels should be made to prevent the decline and extinction of these primates and their habitats. Species action plans now exist at the national level across their distribution which can guide action on the ground.

Gibbons, as excellent seed dispersers, and given their contribution to forest regeneration, have a cascading effect on the entire ecosystem, benefiting numerous plant and animal species. Were they to go extinct, the damage to ecosystems would be irreparable. By protecting gibbons, we ensure the well-being of these dependent species and uphold the delicate balance of biodiversity.

Furthermore, conserving gibbons aligns with the different targets outlined in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. The Global Biodiversity Framework sets forth ambitious targets to tackle the urgent environmental challenges we face. These targets include preserving and restoring habitats, promoting sustainable practices, and engaging local communities in conservation efforts. The framework recognizes the intrinsic interconnectedness of nature, emphasizing the need to safeguard ecosystems for the betterment of present and future generations. The success of the Global Biodiversity Framework depends on the collective efforts of governments, organizations, communities, and individuals to conserve and protect species like gibbons, ensuring a thriving and harmonious coexistence between humans and nature.

By prioritizing gibbon conservation, we actively contribute to the broader mission of creating a sustainable future and safeguarding the invaluable biodiversity that underpins the functionality of our planet's ecosystems.

IUCN
Rue Mauverney 28
1196 Gland, Switzerland
iucn.org
iucnsos.org

@IUCNSOS

KEEP
NATURE
STANDING