

## ◆ Fast facts

- Only 110 cao vit gibbons remain in the wild.
- Cao vit gibbons are the 2nd rarest ape in the world.
- They live only in a small patch of forest on the border between China and Vietnam.
- Cao vit gibbons are also known as Eastern black crested gibbons.
- Cao vit gibbons are categorised as Critically Endangered.
- Cao vit gibbons are protected under CITES Appendix I and Group IB Decree 32/2006 of the Vietnamese law.

## ◆ Introduction

With a known population of just 110 individuals, the cao vit gibbon *Nomascus nasutus* is one of the rarest ape species in the world, second only to its closest relative, the Hainan gibbon *Nomascus hainanus*.

The cao vit gibbon is one of 17 gibbon species that occur throughout the tropical and sub-tropical forests of East and Southeast Asia. All but one of the species are classified as Endangered or Critically Endangered. Gibbons are highly adapted for life in the forest canopy and rarely come to the ground. Gibbons have a unique form of locomotion known as brachiation, moving along below the branches using only their long arms. Gibbons can travel at speeds of up to 55Kmph and cover 6 metres in a single swing.

Gibbons typically form family groups consisting of an adult male–female pair and their sub-adult offspring. The offspring will leave the family group once they reach maturity at 4-5 years. Mature females may give birth to one infant every two to four years.



Distribution of Cao vit gibbons (IUCN 2012)



Adult male cao vit gibbon ©Zhao Chao/FFI



Gibbon pairs strengthen bonds and mark their territory by singing loud and elaborate duets, usually at dawn. Males and females make different calls which can be used to distinguish between sexes, and the songs, which can be heard up to a kilometre away, are highly distinctive and can be used to distinguish between gibbon species.

Adult male cao vit gibbons have an all black body with a crest on the head while adult females vary in colour from yellow to beige with a black patch on the chest and on the top of the head and a large black triangle on her nape and back. Infants are born black and females only get their light colour when they reach maturity.

## ◆ Distribution

Cao vit gibbons are only found in one small area of forest in northeastern Vietnam and southeastern China, northeast of the Red River. They are restricted to the Phong Nam – Ngoc Khe Mountains in Cao Bang Province, Vietnam and the adjacent forest in Jingxi County, Guangxi, China.

## ◆ Habitat & Ecology

Cao vit gibbons once inhabited lower mountain and limestone forests across much of northeast Vietnam. Today, the remaining population is entirely restricted to limestone forests on inaccessible karst outcrops at elevations ranging from 640 – 800m.

The diet of cao vit gibbon consists primarily of fruit, leaves and insects.



Mother and infant cao vit gibbons © Zhao Chao/FFI

### ◆ Threats

Given the already severely restricted habitat of the cao vit gibbon the most immediate threat to its survival is further habitat degradation and loss. The remaining habitat is at risk of being cleared by local communities for cultivation, livestock grazing, fuelwood collection and charcoal production.

As with most primate species in Vietnam the cao vit gibbon is also vulnerable to hunting pressure due to the value of primate bones on the traditional Asian medicine market. Due to its already small population size the cao vit gibbon is threatened by even low levels of hunting.

Furthermore, as with any species whose population size and habitat have been severely reduced, the cao vit gibbon will remain vulnerable to extinction due to natural or man-made disasters such as disease outbreak, forest fire or climate change.

### ◆ Conservation

The cao vit gibbon species is listed in Group IB of Prime Minister's Decree 32/2006, which prohibits all hunting or trade in rare and precious wildlife. The species is offered international protection under CITES Appendix I, which prohibits all commercial trade in the species.

Fauna & Flora International (FFI) has been leading efforts to conserve the cao vit gibbon since 2002 when FFI biologists were the first to confirm the presence of 26 individuals in Cao Bang Province.

Following the discovery of this remnant population the immediate response of FFI was to increase protection of the gibbons and their habitat by establishing a community-based patrol group, which remains in operation today.

In 2007 FFI supported the establishment of the 1,657 hectare Cao Vit Gibbon Conservation Area in Vietnam. In 2009 FFI supported Guangxi Forestry Bureau in protecting a further 6,530 hectares of adjacent forest in China.

FFI has employed a number of different strategies to ensure the continued survival of the cao vit gibbons. These include community outreach programmes, awareness raising, participatory planning, support for local livelihoods, ecological research, habitat restoration, and facilitating transboundary cooperation.



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