



Cao Vit Gibbon Conservation Project

Cao Bang Province, Vietnam

A community-based primate conservation project implemented by

Fauna & Flora International
Vietnam Conservation Support Programme
and

Cao Bang Province and Trung Khanh District
Forest Protection Departments



Two males and a female Cao Vit gibbon hanging out in the forest.

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The aim of the project

Long-term conservation of the Cao Vit gibbon (*Nomascus nasutus nasutus*)

Project objectives

1. Protection of the gibbon population and their habitat
2. Support to local communities to reduce their dependency on forest resources
3. Further understanding of gibbon ecology through scientific research
4. Raising awareness among stakeholders about the Cao Vit gibbon and the importance of its conservation

Project background

The Eastern black crested gibbon, *Nomascus nasutus*, is the rarest ape in the world and critically endangered. Its historical distribution lies in southern Yunnan Province in China, east of the Red River in Vietnam and on Hainan Island in China. There are two known populations, which are now considered to be two separate closely related species. In Vietnam there is the Cao Vit gibbon *Nomascus nasutus nasutus* given its local name, and on Hainan Island the eponymous Hainan gibbon *Nomascus nasutus hainanus*.



In 2002, FFI biologists were able to confirm the presence of at least 26 Cao Vit gibbons in forest straddling Phong Nam and Ngoc Khe Communes in Trung Khanh District, Cao Bang Province in Vietnam, on the border with China. Interview data and field surveys suggest that the species has been extirpated everywhere else within its historical range in Vietnam. Recent surveys confirm the presence of eight groups and nearly 40 individuals.

Surveys carried out in Phong Nam and Ngoc Khe Communes concluded that the following activities have the most negative impact on the gibbon's habitat;

- Exploitation of fuel-wood for domestic consumption or sale;
- Exploitation of wood for repairing houses, water-wheels, and dams;
- Free grazing in core and buffer zone of the protected area; and
- Slope land cultivation inside the protected area.

The main uses of fuel wood are for cooking livestock fodder, distilling alcohol and domestic cooking. Hunting by local Vietnamese hunters has been dramatically reduced due to recent confiscation of guns. People from China also make illegal incursions into the area for hunting, charcoal making and extraction of timber for construction and continue to pose an immediate threat to the species.

The forest has other important biodiversity values including important orchid and conifer species, several species of macaque, giant flying squirrels, musk deer and a tiger gecko, the only record for Vietnam.

Achievements

1. Immediate on the ground protection through the establishment and training of community patrol groups
2. Local agreement on boundaries of a protected area encompassing the gibbon's habitat
3. Support to local communities to reduce extraction of fuel wood from the forest, namely through provision of biogas plants and fuel-efficient stoves.
4. Raised awareness and pride among local communities concerning the gibbon
5. Conservation oriented participatory resource use planning among all 28 villages of the two communes.

Summary of activities

Since the discovery of the gibbon population, Fauna & Flora International has been working with the Provincial and District Forest Protection Departments to reduce immediate threats to their conservation.

Protection

The immediate response to the discovery of the gibbons was to provide some level of immediate protection on the ground. A preliminary core conservation zone and buffer zone were agreed upon by the Commune People's Committees and conservation agreements signed by households in the local villages. A community patrol group has been established comprising members of local communities; two members from each commune and two from the border police. The community patrol group is under the management of the District Forest Protection Department and the project provides support for salaries, training and equipment. The group patrols the core zone and carries out awareness-raising activities among local communities about gibbon conservation.



Community rangers patrol the forest

Fuel wood reduction

Since fuel wood extraction is considered a main threat to the gibbon's habitat, the project has been implementing activities to reduce the need to extract fuel wood from the core zone of the forest. 23 domestic biogas plants have been constructed and there is interest among local people for more biogas plants. These biogas plants use livestock manure, usually from pigs, to generate gas for cooking. Another pilot programme has been carried out to construct fuel-efficient stoves to reduce fuel wood use. 30 pilot stoves were constructed in two villages of two communes. These simple stoves are cheap and easy to construct and should have a greater impact throughout the two communes as the project embarks on a programme to promote improved stoves among the target villages. Fuel wood plantations are also being planned to further reduce the need to extract fuel wood from the forest.



Construction of biogas units

Awareness-raising

Awareness-raising among local communities about the importance of the gibbon and measures to protect it remains an important on-going activity. On a day-to-day basis it is carried out by the community patrol group. The project provides support to them by giving them training and developing and providing educational materials. Project staff also carry out more targeted awareness-raising activities, such as the development of an environmental curriculum for the schools of both communes.



Cao Vit Gibbon Children's Festival

Protected area designation

It appears that activities so far have been successful in reducing short-term threats to the gibbon's habitat. However, steps are now underway to provide the highest level of national protection to the gibbon's habitat through the establishment of a protected area. In December 2004, a provincial-level workshop led to a general agreement to establish a protected area for conservation of the Cao Vit gibbon with support from FFI. Biodiversity surveys and an initial resource use assessment have been carried out to support the collection of background data for the feasibility study. Zoning and management options have also been prepared. At the end of 2005, a participatory resource-use planning exercise was undertaken in all buffer zone villages to support buffer zone communities plan their resource use to minimise impacts on the forest, identify areas of potential conflict and to reach a consensus between local stakeholders on supporting both gibbon conservation and local socio-economic development. The detailed data coming out of the exercise should also support the project to plan future interventions with local communities that maximise conservation gains.

Research

It is essential to understand more clearly the habitat requirements of the gibbon for its long-term survival, so a programme of research is being initiated in 2006. The project will support two Master's students to carry out their research thesis on the ecology of the gibbon with supervision from Vietnam National University and George Washington University in the USA.



Research student in the forest

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