

#100DaysForHollongapar

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An Integrated Conservation Campaign for Safeguarding the Hollongapar Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary in Assam, Northeastern India

“Destroying rainforest for economic gain is like burning a Renaissance painting to cook a meal.”
— E.O. Wilson

What is it?

The #100DaysForHollongapar campaign is a focused initiative dedicated to the conservation of the biodiversity of Hollongapar Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary in Assam, including the Western Hoolock Gibbon (Hoolock hoolock), India's only lesser ape species. This sanctuary is a critical habitat for the gibbons, but it faces significant challenges due to habitat fragmentation, deforestation, and human activities.

How the idea was conceived? – a little backstory

The #100DaysForHollongapar campaign emerged as part of an exercise inspired by a session conducted by Cara Tejpal, a renowned wildlife conservationist and campaign strategist as part of the Ram Hattikudur Advanced Training in Conservation (RHATC) course 2024-25 organized by Zoo Outreach Organisation, Coimbatore. This session focused on the power of campaigns as catalysts for wildlife conservation, emphasizing the importance of grassroots action, local engagement, and effective storytelling in addressing pressing ecological challenges.

Cara Tejpal, known for her advocacy work and her leadership in the Mud on Boots Project at the Sanctuary Nature Foundation, emphasized the importance of grassroots initiatives and the role of local communities in conservation efforts. Her session delved into the key elements of campaign design through interactive discussions and real-world examples. She guided participants in understanding how to design and implement campaigns that resonate with diverse audiences,

inspire collective action, and create tangible change.

During the exercise, participants were encouraged to select a wildlife or conservation cause they felt personally connected to and design a hypothetical campaign around it. Inspired by Cara's insights and the critical need to protect Assam's unique biodiversity, the Hollongapar Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary was chosen as the focal point for this campaign.

The exercise aimed to bridge theoretical knowledge with practical application, encouraging participants to think critically about conservation challenges while developing real-world solutions. The resulting #100DaysForHollongapar campaign aims to raise awareness, foster community involvement, and generate actionable support for the sanctuary through 100 days of sustained advocacy, education,



and fundraising efforts. This campaign reflects the passion, creativity, and dedication fostered during the session, underscoring the role of education and mentorship in shaping future conservation leaders.

About the Place: Hollongapar Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary

Hollongapar Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary stands as one of Assam’s most crucial biodiversity hotspots spanning an area of 20.98 sq. km. Hollongapar is home to an impressive array of wildlife having seven species of primates: The Western Hoolock Gibbon, Stump-tailed Macaque, Northern Pig-tailed Macaque, Eastern Assamese Macaque, Rhesus Macaque, Capped Langur, and the Bengal Slow Loris. It has other mammals like Asiatic Elephants, Leopards, Jungle Cats, Wild Boar, three civet species, and four species of squirrels. At least

219 bird species and 211 species of butterflies are reported from here. The sanctuary also hosts ‘Critically Endangered’ plant species like *Vatica lanceifolia*, adding to its botanical significance.

The sanctuary is classified under IUCN Category IV, denoting it as a habitat or species management area, highlighting its importance in conserving species and critical habitats. It lies in a highly fragmented landscape, divided by a single railway line, which isolates wildlife populations and poses risks of human-wildlife conflict. Surrounding Hollongapar is an Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) encompassing Dissoi Valley Reserve Forest, Dissoi Reserve Forest, and Tiru Hill Reserve Forest. These areas together form a crucial buffer that supports wildlife corridors and facilitates the movement of species.

Why the Need for a Campaign? – A little Context

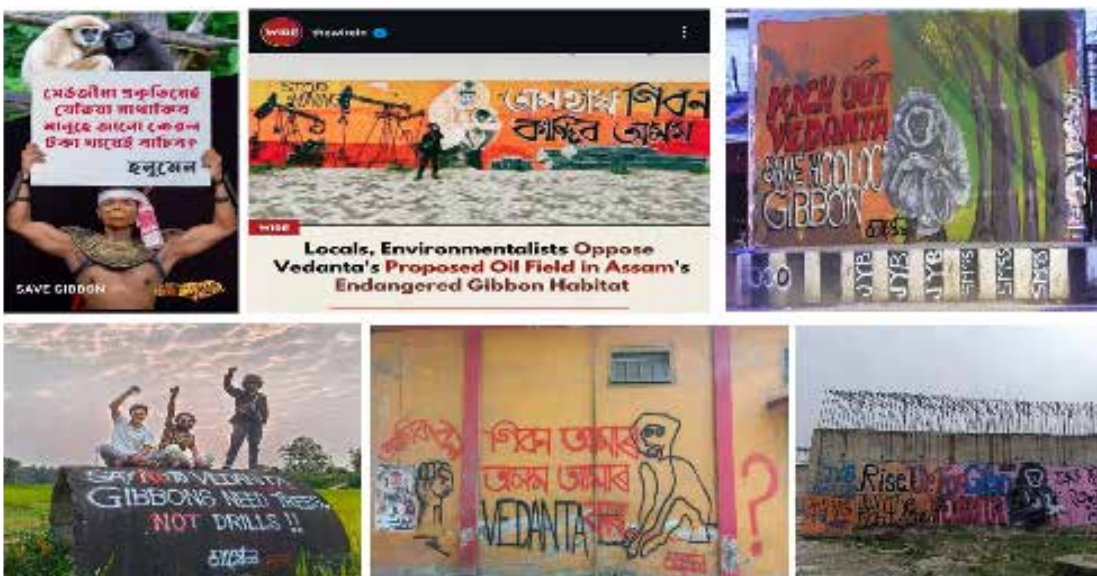
Hollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary (HGS), despite its ecological importance, faces imminent threats that could have irreversible impacts on its biodiversity.

Railway Line Electrification and Expansion:

A 1.65-km un-electrified single railway track cuts through Hollongapar, fragmenting the sanctuary and posing significant risks to wildlife. The ongoing process to electrify this track has raised serious



Courtesy: Singh et al. 2015, JoTT (Vol. 7 No. 1).



Courtesy: Marshall Baruah, Himangshu Prasad Das – Facebook

ecocide concerns among conservationists and local communities. Electrification increases the likelihood of:

- ▶ Electrocutation of arboreal species like the Western Hoolock Gibbon, who frequently cross the canopy over the railway.
- ▶ Heightened railway mortality due to animal collisions.
- ▶ Habitat disturbance and isolation of wildlife populations.

Furthermore, proposals to convert the single line to a double-track threaten to exacerbate these issues, intensifying habitat destruction and disrupting critical movement corridors. Although the project has been cleared by the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL), the long-term consequences for HGS remain deeply concerning.

Oil and Gas Exploration in the Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ):

An Indian conglomerate has been granted Stage 1 clearance for oil and gas exploration on 4.9 ha inside the notified buffer zone of Hollongapar. This buffer, designated as an Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ), is critical for maintaining the sanctuary's ecological balance. On 18 October 2024 the NBWL deferred the final permit for the exploration project, reflecting ongoing debate and concern within conservation circles. However, the looming possibility of future clearance poses a dire threat to the sanctuary's biodiversity. Key risks include:

- ▶ Deforestation and land degradation during drilling activities.
- ▶ Oil spills and contamination of water sources.
- ▶ Displacement of wildlife and disruption of ecological processes.

For an already highly fragmented landscape, these projects could accelerate species decline, impact local communities, and undermine decades of conservation progress.

Raising Voices: An Unorganized Campaign

The permit allowing oil and gas exploration within

the ESZ surrounding the Sanctuary had sparked public concern and resistance across Assam. Environmentalists, local communities, and wildlife enthusiasts have raised alarms about the potential long-term ecological damage this project could inflict on one of India's most vital biodiversity hotspots. Although initial reactions were fragmented and unorganized, the collective outcry gained momentum as awareness spread through social media platforms and grassroots advocacy. Graffiti artist Marshall Baruah and activist Ankuman Bordoloi were sent to 14-day judicial custody after being arrested after protests involving graffiti.

Local conservation groups have urged state authorities to reconsider the exploration permit, highlighting the risks of deforestation, noise pollution, and possible land degradation that could disrupt the delicate balance within the sanctuary. Many voices also pointed to the sanctuary's fragmented nature, further emphasizing that any disturbances could isolate wildlife populations and escalate human-wildlife conflict in the region.

Organizing the Fight for Hollongapar: Revamping the Campaign

These efforts have laid the foundation for more expansive and organized movements. To formalize this momentum, we introduce #100DaysForHollongapar, a campaign designed to galvanize widespread public involvement, launch fundraising initiatives, and exert political pressure to prevent ecologically damaging projects.

Objectives

Immediate:

- ▶ Halt oil and gas exploration activities in the Ecologically Sensitive Zone of Hollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary (HGS).
- ▶ Stop the electrification of the railway track that threatens the sanctuary's integrity.
- ▶ Generate funds to support ongoing litigation and related activities.

Mid-Term:

- ▶ Raise mass awareness about the sanctuary's significance and ecological value.
- ▶ Encourage research on the impacts of

habitat fragmentation and environmental degradation in the area.

Long-Term:

- ▶ Build widespread public support and legal momentum to enforce stronger environmental protections for HGS.
- ▶ Advocate for policies that prioritize ecological conservation over extractive industries in Assam and across India.

Type of Campaign:

The #100DaysForHollongapar campaign will combine multiple strategies to drive action for the sanctuary's protection:

- ▶ **Mobilizing Youth and Community:** Utilize social, electronic, and print media to spread awareness, engage youth, and create viral content.
- ▶ **Influencing Policymakers:** Advocate through lobbying, petitions, and policy briefs to enforce stronger environmental protections.
- ▶ **Offline Events:** Organize Bird Walks, Tree Walks, and Heritage Walks in ecologically important areas across the state to build community involvement.
- ▶ **Peaceful Demonstrations:** Coordinate public protests to raise visibility and show support for the cause.
- ▶ **Educational Outreach:** Engage students (Class 10 and above) through workshops, talks, and educational resources on conservation and biodiversity.
- ▶ **Fundraising:** Raising fund for the community engagement and legal processes.

Timeline

- ▶ As the name suggests, the campaign will run for 100 days as a pilot phase. After this period, the campaign's impact will be evaluated, and decisions about expanding or adapting it will be based on future needs and developments.

Home of the Campaign

- ▶ The campaign will create #100DaysForHollongapar pages on Facebook, Instagram, and X to engage, inform, and mobilize support across these

platforms. We will also have a dedicated website.

- ▶ The campaign will leverage these platforms for in-depth posts, events, and community discussions, visual content such as photos, infographics, and short videos, as well as quick updates, hashtags, and real-time engagement with supporters and influencers.

The logo and the face of the campaign

We are using the Hoolock Gibbon as the face of the campaign whose name is 'Holou' – the Assamese term for Gibbons, with all supporters of the cause being called 'Guardians of Gibbons'.



Social Media Strategy

- ▶ #NotInTheirHome is the centrepiece of the campaign conveying a clear message about respecting wildlife habitats and rejecting actions that disrupt them.
- ▶ Asking people to use #NotInTheirHome for posting facts about Gibbons, Hollongapar, and the impact of deforestation.
- ▶ Encouraging followers to share pictures of trees and wildlife using the hashtag to spread awareness.
- ▶ Create infographics showing the effects of habitat loss on gibbons with the tagline "Habitat Destruction = Extinction: #NotInTheirHome".
- ▶ Host a "virtual march" where users upload videos or photos holding signs with #NotInTheirHome written on them.

Slogans and Taglines

- ▶ Forests for Wildlife, Not Exploitation: #NotInTheirHome
- ▶ Industrial Greed Ends Here: #NotInTheirHome
- ▶ Habitat Destruction Stops Now: #NotInTheirHome

- ▶ Would you like intruders in your home? Gibbons wouldn't either. #NotInTheirHome
- ▶ Development without destruction: #NotInTheirHome
- ▶ Social Media Storms: Coordinate mass posts with the hashtags targeting state and national leaders. #WednesdaysForWildlife

Webinars and Virtual Tours:

Host online events featuring experts every Wednesday discussing the sanctuary's biodiversity and conservation needs for 100 consecutive days – focusing on species-wise needs.

Digital Storytelling:

Share stories, photos, and videos highlighting the gibbons and the sanctuary's unique ecosystem. #ArtistsForHollongapar

Asking artists to share their interpretation of the issue, Biodiversity of Hollongapar or any other related artwork.

Viral Challenge

Encouraging people to share a video swinging or moving or vocalizing like gibbons to symbolize the need for continuous canopies, with the hashtag #MovesLikeGibbons

100 Lucky winners to get 'Guardians of Gibbon' caps with campaign logo.

Finding Collaborators

- ▶ Core Group: RHATC Fellows 2024-25
- ▶ Conservation Educators from different districts of Assam - both rural and urban areas
- ▶ People of Assamese film industry, who usually stands for such cause
- ▶ Literary Personalities
- ▶ Artists
- ▶ NGOs
- ▶ Educational institutions
- ▶ Media Houses
- ▶ Local Newspaper Distributor agencies
- ▶ We have designed a Band/Paper with the logo of the campaign and a QR Code that will lead to few infographics to create awareness about the issue at hand as well as the biodiversity of the sanctuary to reach maximum people



Infographics and Posters

Western Hoolock Gibbons

Hoolock hoolock

Kozhik V Rao & Hirangshu Kalita
RHATC 2024-25

POPULATION

5,000
animals globally,
2,600-4,500 in India

LIFESPAN

20-25
years in the wild, upto
44 years in captivity

GEOGRAPHICAL RANGE

Northeastern India,
Bangladesh, and
Myanmar

HABITAT


Continuous canopy,
broadleaved, wet,
evergreen, and semi-
evergreen forest

PROTECTION STATUS

'Endangered' on the IUCN
Red List and on Schedule
I of the Indian Wildlife
(Protection) Act of 1972

WEIGHT

6-7 kg




FAMILY LIFE
Monogamous pairs. Females give birth to one offspring every 2-3 years, and it remains within the family group for 7-10 years.
Gestation: about 7 months
Sexual maturity: 8-9 years

THREATS
Western Hoolock Gibbons are among the 25 most endangered primate species in the world. Numbers have declined by 90% since the 1990s.
BIGGEST THREATS ARE:

- Destruction, degradation and fragmentation of habitat for agriculture.
- Logging.
- Fuel wood collection.
- Development projects- mines, roads, and railways.
- Poaching for food and trade.

BIODIVERSITY OF HOLLONGAPAR WILDLIFE SANCTUARY


211 species of Butterflies



SAVE THE ANIMALS

Kozhik V Rao & Hirangshu Kalita
RHATC 2024-25

At least 219 species of Birds



3 species of Civets



4 species of Squirrels



Donation Drive

- ▶ #100RupeesForHoolocks
- ▶ #100RupeesForHollongapar

By encouraging individuals to contribute a modest sum of ₹100 to accumulate financial resources to support community engagement programs as well as future needs, such as litigation costs.

Asking people who donated to share the screenshot in the social media with hashtags to inspire others.

Offline Activities

- ▶ Community Workshops: Organize workshops in local communities to discuss the importance of HGS & Current Threats it faces
- ▶ Educational Outreach: Collaborate with schools and universities to organize seminars, workshops, and discussions about the importance of preserving Hollongapar
- ▶ Guided Tree Walks, Nature Walks, Bird Walks and Heritage Walks as part of #WednesdaysForWildlife and discussion therein for HGS.
- ▶ Synchronized silent candle march in different cities in Assam as part of #WednesdaysForWildlife to garner public attention to the campaign

In all the offline activities, we will distribute bands with the logo of the campaign, as well as the QR codes to get access to the infographics and posters. We will ask everyone to take a pledge for conservation of wildlife near our own homes and stand together for safeguarding Hollongapar Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary and the biodiversity within it.

Other Activities

- ▶ Launching a campaign on Change.org to attract nationwide attention.
- ▶ Press releases to local and national media outlets to highlight the campaign and its objectives.
- ▶ Filing a Public Interest Litigation in the Hon'ble Gauhati High Court.

Song of Hollongapar – The Swinging Symphony

In the heart of Assam's green embrace,
Lives a creature with a gentle face.
Hoolock Gibbons swing from tree to tree,
In Hollongapar, wild and free.

Guardians of Gibbons, stand and fight,
Protect their home, preserve their light.
In the forest, hear their call,
Save Hollongapar, protect them all.

Oil rigs threaten their sacred ground,
But together, we can turn it around.
Raise your voice, let the world know,
Hollongapar's future is in our hands to show.

Chorus: Guardians of Gibbons, stand and fight,
Protect their home, preserve their light.
In the forest, hear their call,
Save Hollongapar, protect them all.

Conclusion

The #100DaysForHollongapar campaign has the potential to be a powerful, multi-faceted initiative aimed at protecting the Hollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary and its unique ecosystem. By uniting the community, mobilizing youth, leveraging social media, and engaging policymakers, this campaign strives to halt destructive projects and ensure long-term conservation. Through a blend of awareness, advocacy, and direct action, we aim to foster widespread support for the sanctuary, empowering the next generation of environmental stewards as 'Guardians of Gibbons'. Together, we can secure a future where the Hoolock Gibbons and other wildlife continue to thrive in their natural habitat.