

Hoolock Gibbons - India's only Ape: victim of unscientific practices!

Seventeen primates are found in India of which 11 occur in tropical and subtropical forest of northeastern states of India (Medhi et al. 2007). One such primate found in northeastern India is the Western Hoolock Gibbon *Hoolock hoolock* and the Eastern Hoolock Gibbon *Hoolock leuconedys*. The main threat to hoolock gibbons are habitat destruction and fragmentation- tree felling, encroachment, jhum cultivation, monoculture tree plantation, and poaching (Choudhury 2006). The important factor for the decline of primates population is hunting and trade for their medicinal value (Daolagupu et al. 2021). But gibbons have no medicinal value (Hon 2019); it's a myth and has no scientific basis. Hoolock gibbons contribute to the 57% of the primates used for ethnozoological practices in northeastern India.

In Assam, tribes like Biate and Karbi use different body parts of hoolocks for painless parturition, rheumatism, dizziness, hernia, pertussis. In Arunachal Pradesh, tribes like Monpa and Tangsa use different parts of Hoolock for serious fever, typhoid, malaria, pox, asthma, tuberculosis, and liver cirrhosis. In Mizoram, the Lushai tribe uses the hoolock blood and flesh to cure different ailments like tooth decay, bee sting, toothache, headache to name some (Daolagupu et al. 2021). The Tangsa tribe of Arunachal Pradesh consider the hoolock to be bad omen and any unexpected death of the family member is blamed on them; they hunt

hoolocks, cut them into pieces and don't consume them as they consider them to be bad omen, rather they throw the meat pieces in the jungle for the monkeys (Jugli et al. 2020).

The IUCN Red List shows a suspected reduction of 50% over three generations and categorises *Hoolock hoolock* as 'Endangered' based on forest loss, hunting, and live capture for pet trade. Whereas *Hoolock leuconedys* is categorised as 'Vulnerable' and suspected that population will decline by more than 30% in the next three generations, mainly threatened by habitat loss, hunting for both meat and "traditional medicine". Hunting is less documented but it is one of the major threat for the hoolock gibbons. Importance of hoolock gibbons is beyond ecology as it is part of the biodiversity of the northeastern region. We need to educate people on myths and come up with community based long term measures to save gibbons with whom we share our common ancestry!



Distribution of hoolock gibbons in northeastern India.
<https://www.zora.uzh.ch/id/eprint/58635>

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Ishika Shah

RHATC Fellow 2025–26, Zoo Outreach Organisation, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India.

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