

# Outings with Hoolock of Delo

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Delo is small and a sleepy village under Kronu circle of Lower Dibang Valley district, Arunachal Pradesh. The area is inhabited by *Mishmis*.

Unlike most tribes of the state, people of this area usually do not hunt Hoolock gibbon. As per the oral mythology of the *Mishmi* tribe, hoolocks are descendents of the same ancestors as human beings and are regarded to be the elder brother. Therefore killing of hoolock is forbidden in their society.

Hoolock gibbon was abundant in Dibang Valley District until the 1950 earth quake. Unfortunately, after this devastating quake, people from the hilly terrain migrated to low-lying fertile land of the district. The consequence of clearing the forest cover for settlement, cultivation, etc., destroyed the habitat of hoolock, leading to its complete extinction starting right from Sodía to Roing town. Fortunately due to the mythological belief of the *Mishmi* tribe, the hoolocks still occur in Delo and Koronu area.

Hoolock gibbon, Endangered (EN) and listed in the IUCN Red List and schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. The only ape found in India, it is distributed in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Nagaland and Meghalaya. The IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group has estimated that there are about 600-700 hoolocks sparsely distributed in 133 localities in North East India. It was also listed in the World's 25 most Endangered Primates for four years. There are two sub-species of hoolock gibbon, e.g., Eastern hoolock gibbon (*Hoolock leuconydes*) and Western hoolock gibbon (*Hoolock hoolock*). Eastern hoolock gibbon is found only in Arunachal Pradesh (Dibang Valley, Lohit and some part of Changlang), Myanmar and China. Whereas, Western hoolock is found in Assam Arunachal (Changlang and Tirap), Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Bangladesh.

Hoolock gibbon is facing serious anthropogenic disturbances such as hunting, poaching and habitat destruction and fragmentation in Arunachal Pradesh as well as other parts of northeastern region. Decreasing in an area by about one third in last 10 years because of habitat loss and encroachment, quality of habitats, loss of fruiting & sleeping trees and increase in canopy gaps, the natural population of gibbon has been reduced. In addition, trade for blood, bones, fur, and meat as a supplementary food and medicine are other causes for its decline.

For the hoolock of Delo, the main threat are conflict with dog, worm infestation and habitat destruction due to agriculture, horticulture and tea plantation. I stumbled across this problem during 2005, in one of my tour programmes relating to microchip implantation on elephants under project elephant.

As directed by Chukhu Loma, Deputy Chief Wildlife warden Naharlagun, I was doing rough assessment of hoolock population of the state along with my microchip duty. After going through my report, he obtained a permission from PCCF (Wildlife) for rescue of those hoolocks.

The first ever rescue operation on the species was attempted during the month of June 2006. There was no literature or expert to consult at that point of time. Although some scientists were working on the species, those were only preliminary and mostly their biological and habitat study. No record on their anatomy, physiology, treatment and tranquilization were available. I packed my

tranquilizing equipment, other necessary medicine and appliances and left for Delo with my driver and one animal keeper.

My journey expenditure was contributed by Hiba Taji, Curator Biological Park, Itanagar and Chukhu Loma. The food and lodging was arranged Nani Sha, DFO Mihao Wildlife Sanctuary and subsequently by Tana Tapi. At that time there were about 200 hoolocks (by head count) within 28 sq km of area which was subsequently reduced to 80 by the month of March 2009, my last visit to the area. The reductions in the number are attributed mostly to dog biting and worm infestation.

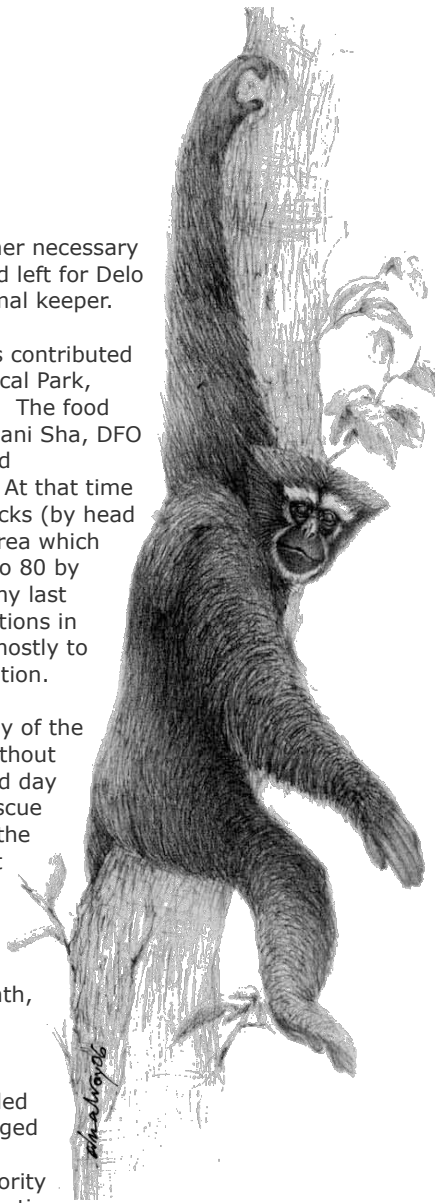
First day was spent in survey of the area. Second day passed without any success, but by the third day evening, we managed to rescue one female with baby from the mouth of a dog and brought them back to Itanagar Zoo. Again, during March 2007, we managed to rescue five more animals from the area. During the same month, there was a national level conference on conservation breeding of wild animals at Guwahati, which was attended by Chukhu Loma. He managed to convince the Member Secretary, Central Zoo Authority for establishment of conservation breeding centre at the Biological Park, Itanagar. There were many competitors for the species including Delhi zoo, Assam state zoo, Tripura zoo and Aizwal zoo.

To start the breeding centre we still needed some more animals as parent stock. On December 2007, I went to Delo again with my team. After two days of hectic schedule, we could rescue four animals. Pasang, my animal keeper and an expert climber who was with me throughout the rescue operation was badly injured by one of the animal. After first aid, we were returning via Dambuk- Mebo Road, when on the way one female hoolock, injured during the rescue operation, died. We buried her and offered a brief prayer for the departed soul.

On reaching the bank of river Siang, our vehicle got stuck in a small stream. We tried to pull out the vehicle without success. Tana Tapi now DFO Pakke wildlife sanctuary fell in the water while pushing the vehicle. We used to call him Mokhna- the solitary male elephant because of his daredevil character while discharging his duty to protect animals. However, here the Mokhna was shivering in cold and groaning with pains, and was totally helpless.

Pasang was sitting over a rock holding his injured hand, looking very small and in need of some motivation. It was more of a psychological problem we had at hand. Sensing it I collected some straw, wood, and managed to start a fire. Being near the fire, we regained our courage. Finally, we

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succeeded in pulling out our vehicle. It took us five hours and it was already midnight.

I managed to call my brother Talang Panor and my brother in-law Dr. Tagum Tamut for help. At 2 AM, both of them along with Onyok Tamuk the owner of the ferry, came to our rescue.

Finally, on 5th Aug 2008, our hard work paid off. A female baby hoolock was born in the zoo and the news took the wildlife world by storm. Earlier the animal was believed to be unbreedable species in captivity. Thereafter, within a span of three years, the zoo saw four more hoolock babies.

Now the zoo is proudly leading the conservation breeding of the species in the country.

Again on 2009, I left for Delo with a team comprising of Tana Tapi, Alok Kr. Singh Ipra, Sunil and his WTI (Wildlife Trust of India) and Riba DFO Wildlife Roing and their team. This time our project was to rescue and translocate those stranded hoolocks from Delo to Mihao Wildlife Sanctuary. After four days of hard work, we could capture only one animal.

On the fourth day, I got sick with unexplainable symptoms. I was taken to hospital and treated for lack of glucose in the body. It did not help. I could not sleep the whole night. There was feeling of hollowness and helplessness. Something was really going wrong inside my body. I thought I was going to die. I thought of my wife and children and felt sorry for them.

Next morning I was taken to a local priest. We had not told him anything but after examining me he started laughing and diagnosed that my problem was because I had captured monkeys! Immediately after some rituals, I became all right. But after five months the symptoms reappeared.

I went to CMC Vellore for a thorough medical check-up. After staying there for one month, I came back with perfectly healthy medical certificate. However, not satisfied with the report, I went to AIIMS Delhi. Except for irritable bowel syndrome, there was no significant diagnosis. With no choice left, I went to a local priest again.

My life is limping back to normalcy after performing rituals to ward away the monkey ghosts! I hope to recover for good very soon. However, my idea of rescue and translocation of stranded hoolocks of Delo remains a distant dream.



We're moving to a new place.

Our New Address

**Zoo Outreach Organisation /  
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We will let you know our new Landline numbers when it is transferred to the new address. Until then you are requested to contact us either by email or by our mobile number.

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