DRAFT Report of Plenary Working Group discussion, 29 January 2009: Requirements for successful conduct of Wild to Wild Rapid Translocations for Future Conservation Potential for Hoolock Gibbon

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Discussion

1. GIS

For GIS it was felt that coordinating with several other departments in India was the correct approach. These include ASTEC-ARSAC, North East Space Application Centre, Gagan (To standardize the error in GPS) and possibly others.

Funding was also discussed specifically for GIS and the following donor agencies were recommended. Dr. Fred Launay gave a short presentation on a new funding agency for species and participants suggested others, e.g.

The Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund
http://www.mbzspeciesconservation.org/
Margot March Biodiversity Fund, MMBF
MAVA Foundation
www.mava-foundation.org/en/qui_en.html
Mac Arthur Foundation
www.macfound.org
Whitley Trust
www.whitley-award.org
Ford Foundation
www.fordfound.org/grants

2. Survey

In addition to the habitat survey information provided by GIS mapping, it is necessary to conduct survey(s) of the Hoolock Gibbon populations in all localities, including health status. A format for health status should be designed by a suitable individual or organization and quickly circulated for comments and adopted by all Hoolock Gibbon states. Major components of the population surveys include:

a. A common survey protocol should be developed and circulated for suggestions and then adopted by all Hoolock Gibbon states for sake of consistency and accuracy. Participants felt that WADWT which will manage a central Database should be the caretaker and monitor of the information gathered.

b. Minimum requirement - Presence/absence in order to evaluate the needs of Hoolock Gibbon states for translocations of doomed populations is a presence absence survey which might be done by foresters or even locals in every single locality heretofore reported to hold Hoolock Gibbons. The presence/absence survey is useful in insuring that all populations are included. A target of completing presence absence within a very short time following the receipt of this report is suggested by Editor, e.g. 3-6 months, the earlier the better in view of the urgency of salvaging some individuals which otherwise would not survive long under current conditions.

c. Priority setting and plan requirement — A more elaborate survey is required to make management decisions and make time bound plans based on rational priorities. Such a survey should include number, sex, health condition (if possible), environmental conditions at sites, including threats, etc.

d. Comprehensive survey format should include
i. Habitat Evaluation- Threats
ii. Ground truthing for GIS

e. Surveys of isolated populations are most urgent as these populations are more at risk of extirpation by a great variety of factors.

f. Surveys for long term comparison – for purpose of research it would be useful to conduct a detailed Census including Demographic data of 2 of the same selected sites in each state every 2 years so that a historical profile can be accurately maintained.

g. Survey for Identification of potential release sites – this is to include a history of the locality, the other animals in the area including their health status , threats, as well as evaluation of habitats for appropriateness of Hoolock Gibbon. Although obvious, it should be noted that all sites should be within the natural or historical range of Hoolock Gibbon.

h. Another Population and Habitat Viability Assessment Workshop (PHVA) after the detailed surveys are complete, get an up-to-date overview of the probability of extinction of the species. The PHVA would also examine other isssues which have arisen since the first PHVA. This PHVA should be country specific and would not require so many participants and therefore not so much money. The output will be dramatically different and will give good insight into what actions should be taken on the basis of genuinely current information.

3. Capacity Building Programme for translocation of Hoolock Gibbon

A capacity building programme designed specifically for the purpose of planning, undertaking and monitoring translocation of Hoolock Gibbon was felt to be required by workshop participants. Listed below are the topics for training and ideas mentioned.

a. Orientation on wild to wild rapid translocation

All persons to be involved with Hoolock Gibbon translocation to be trained with primary information or the basics of translocation. As the meaning and method of the word "translocation" as applied to wildlife has become vague with incorrect or misnamed practice, it is required to conduct orientation

training for persons who may be involved but did not attend the workshop in September 2008 or the workshop in January 2009. The meaning of "translocation" as used in this document is essentially the definition from the Guidelines of the IUCN SSC Reintroduction Specialist Group, to wit:

Definition of Terms : "Translocation": deliberate and mediated movement of wild individuals or populations from one part of their range to the other. (from IUCN Guidelines for Reintroductions, IUCN SSC Reintroduction Specialist Group, 1998) http:// www.iucnsscrsg.org/download/English.pdf

The workshop organizers, hosts and sponsors have, in view of the wide range of misconceptions and misnomers of a range of movements of wild animals adopted the descriptor of "wild to wild rapid translocation" to insure that what we intend is not mistaken for any other type of movement of wildlife. Methods involving captive or so called "conservation" bred wild animals, rescued individuals, rehabilitated animals, pet, orphaned, or otherwise "held" individuals will have their place and no criticism is intended to any organization of good intention with its primary purpose the conservation interests of species over self.

b. Census methodology
One forest officer from each state will be invited for training on census methods of gibbons.

c. Capacity building principles
Different training for different levels of personnel. Training should involve high profile personality including media to generate more awareness.

d. Equipment required for translocation exercise
Training in the availability and use of all required equipment for research, planning, implementation and monitoring of Hoolock Gibbons in context of translocation.

4. List of equipment
Participants and resource persons of the workshop and others with experience in translocation may suggest equipment which should be included in a list for the training purpose, keeping in mind the accessibility, feasibility, appropriateness and cost of equipment. Information on suppliers in the country will be very useful.

5. Genetic study – Arunachal Pradesh
Since the PHVA workshop held in 2005 in Bangladesh, research and field studies have revealed that 1. The two types of Hoolock Gibbon, formerly thought to be two subspecies are in fact species (*Hoolock hoolock* and *Hoolock leuconedys* also known as Western Hoolock Gibbon and Eastern Hoolock Gibbon) and 2. Although until now it was thought that India had only Western Hoolock Gibbon, according to a study by Das *et al* some populations of Eastern Hoolock Gibbon, *Hoolock leuconedys, reside in the state of Arunachal Pradesh in India. In view of this, care should be taken there should be no mixing of species under any circumstances.*

6. Trial Translocations – All resource persons were united in the suggestion that trial translocations should be considered as early as possible so that the natural obstacle of trying something new could be overcome, while gaining practical knowledge and practice of the myriad elements of preparation, implementation and follow-up can be evaluated and modified if necessary. Adequate care including preparation, equipments, logistics, team members, etc. should be taken with these trials, so that disasters which might prevent future exercises can be avoided. It was the view of resource persons that external experts be called to complement the local team.

a. Three demonstration or trial sites were discussed and identified as likely prospects, one each in Tripura, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Arunachal Pradesh may be first as they have already done some work, identifying a needy population and a suitable site for release.

b. Identification of stakeholders. All the parties with a vested interest should be identified.

c. Public Information

i. Involvement of Media

Media can be a tremendous aid to the success of conservation projects as well as a threat. Dr. Fred Launay shared some of his experience with press, emphasizing the need to inform and educate the press on the subtleties of the operation well in advance of the exercise with suitable meetings and materials. The press can publish feature and news article as well as meetings so they may attune people to the proposed exercise and clarify misconceptions. In order to do this, the press has to be sensitized with background material and press releases that are simple, short and accurate as they are under many constraints such as time, space and having to serve the public at large over a wide range of educational levels.

ii. Education and awareness

Likewise Education and awareness activities of stakeholders of all levels must be instituted well before the actual translocation takes place. Stakeholders living in the area where the exercise is to take place may not want the animals to be removed (in the case of donor site) or they may not want the animals anywhere near them (in case of recipient site). They may also try to gather close around creating unwanted difficulties in conducting this delicate operation. They need to be educated about the overall importance of the project and the need for a certain amount of space, silence and privacy for the translocation team to work through the operation, from beginning to end. In no case should public approach the site or vehicle to see the animals or get their attention by make sounds or snapping their fingers, beating on the cage, etc.

iii. Political support

The support of all levels of government is absolutely necessary to any sensitive project. Government (and also media, public, etc.) should be carefully briefed with transparent information. When moving or doing almost any unnatural activity with animals, there is some risk of accident which may lead to the injury or death of the animal. This is certainly a risk when conducting a large number of movements or a

new activity. So that government or pressure groups do not stand in the way of future translocations in reaction to a single unfortunate event, it is good to explain the risks and the options available. In the case of Hoolock Gibbon situated in small, isolated and otherwise unsuitable habitats it is a matter of time until the entire family or group is lost in any case. Translocation is a method of saving these animals as well as strengthening the populations of Hoolock Gibbons near the release site.

iv. Other ways to spread the word

Meeting the people whom we know, giving background, status of species, work plan, etc. and targeting open-minded individuals and involve them in the next stages, will invite their cooperation in advertising and being a friend to the project.

d. Action Items for Trial Translocations

Tentative examples of information to be gathered and considered;

- where you want to capture and release
- type of areas, land tenure system, logistics, etc.
- number of animals
- equipments, no. of people, telemetry requirements (GPS, or conventional tracking); time to gather
- distance from the release sites- logistics
- assessment of total project (materials required, condition of the site, obstacles, threats, contingency actions) before drafting the proposal,
- transportation (back up vehicles if required)
- Government permissions – Central Govt., state government
- Team – for these first exercises it is advisable to work with an experienced external team
  - External trainers and advisors - Primatologist, Handling expert, Veterinarian familiar with reintroduction and primates, Reintroduction/ Translocation expert all capable of on site training and communicating with local experts and other staff.
  - Local experts and staff - handlers, experienced wildlife veterinarian, veterinary technician, biologist, forester, driver, photographer/recorder.
  - Always mindful that the more people at the site, the more confusion.
- Coordinator – Senior forester who is knowledgeable of the area and the species
- Documentation

7. Central Database – WADWT ; Live interactive website

A Central Database will be established by the Wildlife Areas Development and Wildlife Trust, WADWT which will maintain items such as lists of food plants and lodging trees, published articles on Hoolock Gibbons, translocations protocols and other relevant information, bibliography, list of experts and their area of expertise and contact details; survey results of sites, size, date, population, areas, profile of area situation, and past history of Hoolock Gibbons in the site.

Priorities for Translocation of Hoolock Gibbons *Statewise*

This plenary working group took place after lunch of the second day of the January 2009 Translocation Training workshop for Hoolock Gibbon. Representatives from all seven range states of Hoolock Gibbon were present at the workshop.

Three states were represented by the Chief Wildlife Wardens (Assam, Manipur, Tripura), two states by Dy. Chief Wildlife Wardens (Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh), and two states by senior forest officers posted in range of Hoolock Gibbon (Mizoram and Nagaland)

Each state detailed it priority actions for the conservation of Hoolock Gibbons specifically relating to Translocation. These priorities are not included in this document.

Next steps

There is much more work to be done before any gibbons should be moved. There are some complications in the state of Arunachal Pradesh in that their largest population of Hoolocks and also their largest locality of forest fragments holding individual families and solitaires are not Western Hoolock Gibbons, *Hoolock hoolock* but the other species, *Hoolock Leuconydes*. Earlier the Arunachal Pradesh captured 14 Hoolocks from the locality mentioned above without knowing they were a different species of Hoolock. Fortunately this came to light before any of these animals could be sent to other Indian zoos, as one reason for this capture operation was to initiate an ambitious captive breeding programme throughout the zoos of the North East. The ensuing hybrids would have been an embarassment for years to come as well as a waste of wildlife for conservation. Even, there could be further anomalies out and all this has to be checked. New surveys have to be done in localities which have not been survey in past five years. This is a rather large number ... many of the localities have not been studied since 1988 and perhaps there are even populations in localities which have never been survey at all.

Workshop participants, Chief Wildlife Wardens and their representatives, will have a big job to convince others in their state and even in the country in the Ministry that translocation should be done at all and that it is a better option than capture for captive breeding. There are risks, of course, and government agencies do not like risks and with good reason. These participants, having had such a detailed exposure to the guidelines of the Reintroduction Specialist Group IUCN SSC RSG and the benefit of experience from people like RSG Chair, Dr. Fred Launay and Mike Jordan, Chair of RSG Europe and North Asia and Cecilia Kierulff who have conducted hundreds of various types of successful releases, may be hard pressed to convince their colleagues and NGO who are still locked into the various dubious practices so popular of late.