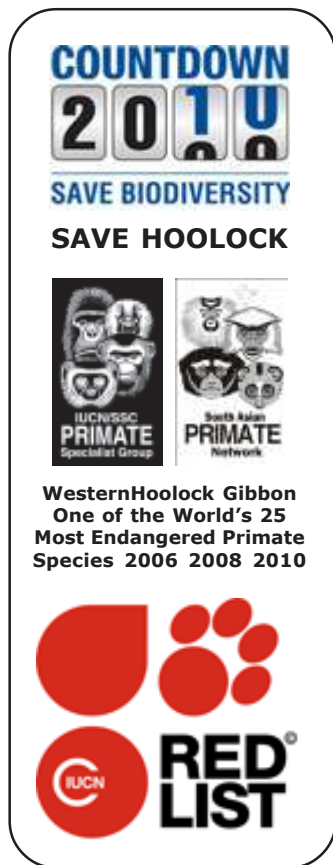


COUNTDOWN 2010 * SAVE HOOLOCK GIBBON * SAVE BIODIVERSITY

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The Western Hoolock Gibbon (WHG), although assessed as Endangered by the Global Mammal Assessment (GMA) to be officially released in October 2008 at the IUCN Global Forum, is actually Critically Endangered in India and Bangladesh when assessed using the Regional and National Red List Criteria and current, local expertise. In India and in Bangladesh the extent of degradation and fragmentation of Hoolock forests is very severe and is continuing to steadily decline. Naturally, populations of animals are declining also, instead of increasing or remaining stable as they should do ... and would do in rich, healthy, contiguous forests which had been cleared of threats.

There has been much

activity among the field biologists, foresters and wildlife enthusiasts of India and Bangladesh who want very much to help Hoolock survive and thrive, but it is not enough. Dramatic improvement to forests such as those which would create a safe environment, protection for the animals and strengthening of some of the better localities perhaps, with the numerous small families of Hoolock gibbons that can't survive in their isolated tree or minute piece of forest.

In order to save the Hoolock Gibbon from extinction, we need a campaign to reach and convince the policy makers both in the states and in the central governments of each country that it is of crucial importance and deserves attention and action. Hoolock Gibbon is the only ape among the primates of India and Bangladesh. It is a unique, rare, fragile animal which needs a better deal. It was declared one of the world's 25 most endangered primate species by a group of primatologists in 2006 to last until 2008, and again last month (August) 2008-2010 at the 22nd bi-annual conference of the world's largest primate society. In this two years, it is crucial to do something effective...not something - many things.

A perhaps presumptuous proposal

Drastic action is required and for this we propose piggybacking on one of the world's most prestigious

campaigns — the **Countdown 2010 to Save Biodiversity** as a theme to ride to success or at least improvement. Whole governments are doing giant projects to 'Save Biodiversity' in various forms. We know the governments of India and Bangladesh are looking at all species and habitats — all biodiversity. All biodiversity is huge but if a group of hardy souls try very hard to generate local support for this one beleaguered species and its failing forests in parts of Bangladesh and eight states of India, maybe the dedicated NGOs, state forest departments, individual foresters, primate researchers could make a difference for Hoolock Gibbon in the next 2+ years.

Biodiversity conservation can be taken on at different levels and we have taken the species conservation approach whereby conserving an umbrella species like the Hoolock Gibbon will help in conservation of biodiversity in areas where it occurs. Taking on the goal of *substantially improving Hoolock Gibbon's chances of survival* bit by bit and using Countdown 2010 and 25 Most Endangered Primates as stimuli then by 2010 we should have significantly improved WHG's chances by improving its forests and strengthening populations.

For this many things need to be done — hard things — like increasing forest area by joining fragments, increasing populations by moving "living dead" groups of 2-3 individuals to areas sufficiently close to larger populations to permit successful migration and other natural behaviours.

These types of actions require intense dedication of well-informed and empowered persons. Generating support and enthusiasm which would be sufficiently strong to unite the people is required to make decisions and to work on this. The combination of these two powerful symbols — Countdown 2010 & World's 25 — may attract the right kind of energy to a difficult but nevertheless do-able project.

About Countdown 2010

More than one decade after the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the recognition of biodiversity loss has gained high political profile both at global, national and regional levels. This has resulted in ambitious commitments for action by heads of states, initiated in 2001 in the European Union.

While at global level, the target is 'to achieve a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss', the one addressed at EU and pan-European level, is even more ambitious as to 'halt the loss of biodiversity'. Since 2006, the 2010 Biodiversity Target



is fully integrated into the Millennium Development Goals.

The 2010 biodiversity target is just around the corner. There's an emerging consensus about what needs to be done to save biodiversity within the next years:

1. Species and ecosystems need space to develop and recover. At least 10% of all ecosystem types should be under protection to maintain nature and natural landscapes.
2. Without biodiversity there will be no agriculture. Farming practices should not jeopardize species survival: improving farmland diversity and reducing the usage of pesticides and fertilisers are key efforts to saving biodiversity. Organic agriculture practices can serve as an example in many areas.
3. 75% of all fisheries are fully exploited or over-fished. Species like cod, haddock and halibut are already threatened. If we do not move towards sustainable use, there will be no fish left for our grandchildren.
4. Roads, factories and housing destroy habitats for animals and plants. If urban and rural development continues to ignore nature, our surroundings will be dominated by concrete and pollution.
5. Climate change is considered to be the greatest challenge for humanity. With changing conditions, ecosystems and habitats will change as well. It is an obligation to fight climate change and make sure that species can migrate or adapt to new surroundings.
6. If you release a species outside its usual habitat, it might simply die. In other cases, the so-called alien invasive species have thrived and destroyed local flora and fauna. As you never know how things turn out, reducing these invasions is crucial.
7. Biodiversity is the foundation for sustainable development. Its ecosystem services provide the basis for all economic activity. Biodiversity concerns need thus be integrated into all areas of policy-making. Measures include market incentives, development assistance, biodiversity-friendly trade and international governance processes.

Since the adoption of the Convention on Biological Diversity in 1992, most countries have developed National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans. These plans outline specific measures to reach the objectives of the convention and, more recently, the 2010 biodiversity target. All National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans can be found at www.biodiv.org/reports.

About the World's 25 Most Endangered Primate Species List [W25MEPS 2000-2010]

Every two years since 2000, primatologists from all over the world gather at a special meeting which takes place during the bi-annual conference of the International Primatological Society. Among a variety

of formal and generally dignified presentations, meetings, seminars and discussions there is a well-attended, informal (chaotic, actually) night meeting where a good representation of primatologists select 25 primate species for listing in a relatively new but popular and effective classification, that is, the **25 Most Endangered Primate Species List**.

This designation is not a Red List classification although it is probably the case that any primates which made it on the "25 Most" list are also Red Listed. The criteria for "25" are not only concerned with level of risk but also potential for being helped by targeting on the list and promoting in articles, campaigns and education programmes. Species are selected based on their threatened status according to the IUCN Red List Categories (only Endangered and Critically Endangered species are considered. Vulnerable species are not usually considered although a compelling argument could influence their inclusion), geographic representation, the possibility of effecting a change to their status and the preparedness of species activators.

The now well-known "World's 25 Most Endangered Primate Species" list, which is reviewed and revised bi-annually at the IPS conference has become a collaborative project of the Primate Specialist Group (PSG), Conservation International (CI) and the International Primatological Society (IPS).



The meeting tries to select so that each primate region has a few taxa on the list. In 2006-08 listing, the Western Hoolock Gibbon was listed for the first time in the W25MEPS. In August 2008 it was listed for the second time.

Why ?

In Assam State, where Hoolock Gibbon was abundant, according to satellite data, forests continue to be cleared. In Borajan, two of the eight individuals of Hoolock Gibbons have been lost. The major problem with Hoolock is isolation of populations, which leads to more subpopulations which are too small to survive.

In Arunachal Pradesh State the forests in the foothills are undergoing destruction on a mass scale due to commercial timber extraction or conversion of forest land for crops (small tea gardens or orange orchards (J.Das, in litt., July 2008). So the Hoolock group size in village forests has decreased further and there is no possibility for creation of new groups or genetic mixing due to isolation. Some tribes in the state even consume gibbon meat as part of their traditional beliefs.

On the basis of such facts, a computer simulation model run as part of a PHVA workshop predicted a

95% decline in the Bangladesh population and a 75% decline in the Indian population over the next two decades, largely due to human impact and other fundamental factors influencing small, isolated populations (Molur et al. 2005). Population trends for WHG in recent years in Bangladesh and northeastern India indicate a very rapid decline in numbers. Thus, immediate measures are required of governments, forest agencies, local communities and NGOs in order to curb decline.

Despite participatory analyses and intensive efforts to present the case for helping the WHG to decision makers, actions resulting in significant habitat improvement and safer populations have not taken place.

Therefore, at a chaotic night meeting at IPS, primatologists from around the world listened to northeastern Indians and others describe the plight of Hoolock Gibbon and voted to keep the WHG on the World's 25 Most Endangered Primate Species List for the second two-year period, from 2008-2010. Our objective and intention is that by 2010, a very important date in context with Countdown 2010, it will be possible to announce that WHG is recovering, with action steps and commitments in place to sustain recovery. We can then proudly withdraw Hoolock Gibbon from the W25MEPS list. Our goal is to truthfully announce at the next IPS meeting that Hoolock Gibbon does not need to be listed among the "World's 25" any longer.

In the announcement of the results for primates of the Global Mammal Assessment it emerged that 50% of the world's primates were threatened with extinction, based on the IUCN Red List Criteria. Looking at only Asian primates, a whopping 70% are threatened. For South Asia, it is 65.1%.

Despite the gloomy assessment, conservationists point to a notable success in helping targeted species recover. In Brazil, the black lion tamarin (*Leontopithecus chrysopygus*) was downlisted to Endangered from Critically Endangered, as was the golden lion tamarin (*Leontopithecus rosalia*) in 2003, as a result of three decades of conservation efforts involving numerous institutions. Populations of both animals are now well-protected but remain very small, causing an urgent need for reforestation to provide new habitat for their long-term survival.

In a press interview at the announcement of the release of Primate assessments from the IUCN Red List, Conservation Scientist and Dy. Director, IUCN Primate Specialist Group said "If you have forests, you can save primates," He referred to "work with lion tamarins in Brazil shows that conserving forest fragments and reforestation to create corridors that connect them is not only vital for primates, but offers the multiple benefits of maintaining healthy ecosystems and water supplies while reducing greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change."
If Brazil can do it, why not India.

For all its importance as a motivator, the Countdown 2010 campaign doesn't seem to be as evident as one would expect in conservation publicity. Maybe it seems too big to be meaningful. The Countdown 2010 newsletter recently reviewed the activities of a few local / municipal governments, which is comfortingly "do-able". There is a species goal, e.g. "*Species and ecosystems need space to develop and recover. At least 10% of all ecosystem types should be under protection to maintain nature and natural landscapes*"

Of course, that is huge, but if we break it down to one species in one country or part of a country, it is still a total challenge, but one with which a group of state governments, organizations and individuals could take up. Narrowing focus from the world, continental region or the country to a sub-region or few localities and a species or even subspecies gives a new and more motivating perspective.

Zoo Outreach Organisation, Wildlife Information Liaison Development and its South Asian networks have noted that northeastern India with its 10 primates and so much other species richness would be a worthy focus for a campaign. ZOO & WILD will, if governmental authorities, NGOs and field biologists agree, focus our attention on Hoolock Gibbon, and other northeastern Indian primates.

According to our strategy, the agencies, organizations and NGOs who want to participate can be associates, but with permission to use the campaign as designed by us, apply for their own grants, do their own projects, reports to their donors, etc. ZOO/WILD's role will be as a promotional or public relations agency but raising our own funds for a variety of promotional material which will be available to all in small quantities of actual material and as camera-ready copy.

The campaign does not have to be only about northeastern India. It doesn't have to be limited to primates, or ZOO and WILD. We wish many people would select a species, a subspecies, a population, a habitat, a locality ... whatever they feel they can improve with hard work and a narrow focus, as part of the Global Biodiversity Programme COUNTDOWN 2010.



Save Forests. Save Hoolock Gibbons.