

## Wild to Wild Translocation Training for Hoolock Gibbon held Assam

A training to undertake conservation actions recommended at the Hoolock Gibbon PHVA held at Dhaka, Bangladesh in 2005 was conducted on 15-19 September at the Forest Training School, Jalukbari, Assam. The training had been a long time in planning and awaiting just the right resource persons. Finally, dates were fixed and resource persons rounded up and participants invited.

The training centred on one of the problems discussed at the PHVA, that is the phenomenon of small, wild, isolated populations (actually families) of 2-3 individuals in virtual fragments of forest located far from larger groups. With no possibility of gene transfer between different groups and scant potential for restoring the forest fragments (some of which are surrounded by villages or agricultural fields), these animals could be called "living dead". In the PHVA many of these isolates were identified and it was recommended that they be translocated from certain doom as has been happening with increasing regularity, to localities where they had a chance of survival and being linked with a larger group in course of time. A recommendation from the workshop for this conservation action and tentative and unsystematic plans for doing so inspired the plan for special training.

The training was envisioned to be a "wild to wild" translocation with which would be meticulously planned but conducted rapidly to avoid the wild animals being in human care for long. However, having surveyed the primate community for persons who had done wild to wild translocations and turning up empty-handed, we were forced for some time to consider.

A case study of Golden Lion Tamarin translocations as opposed to GLT reintroductions or rehabilitations of captive and semi captive animals indicated that wild to wild without lengthy quarantine or human handling had the greater chance of success.

Therefore the workshop focused only on wild animals that would be doomed without action, managed in such a way that they could contribute to the wild gene pool for years to come.

The position of Hoolock Gibbon is very precarious in India having declined from one lakh individuals to 5000 in just four decades, a decline of 90%. Human being settling in or near forest areas led to fragmentation of once contiguous forests and Hoolocks from 18 locations were extinguished in less than five years.

Currently Bangladesh has only about 200 individuals in 22 locations, 3 with < 20, another 3 < 15, and 14 < 10 individuals.

India has about 200 locations holding Hoolocks but 77 of these locations have less than 20 individuals and 47 less than 10 individuals.

The organisers were very lucky to locate the Brazilian biologist who conducted the wild to wild translocations of Golden Lion Tamarins ALL of which successfully settled into their new, safer locations. This was a dramatic success rate compared to earlier captive GLT reintroductions. Dr. Cecilia Kierulff, now Conservation Coordinator at the Sao Paulo Zoo, kept participants and other resource persons spellbound with her saga of translocating the GLTs. Dr. Kierulff's Ph.D. guide, the well-known Dr. David Chivers of Cambridge University was kind to attend and fill in blanks about gibbon biology and behaviour and share his experience in South East Asia with a variety of gibbons. Mike Jordan, Chair, Reintroduction Specialist Group, Europe and North Asia also had reintroduced and translocated hundreds of mammals and his presentations complimented those of Drs. Kierulff and Chivers. Sanjay Molur and Sally Walker represented the Reintroduction Specialist Group of South Asia, Conservation Breeding specialist Group, South Asia and Primate Specialist Group, South Asia.

The workshop was generously sponsored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Chester Zoo and Knowsley Safari Park.

The first two days of the five day workshop consisted of didactic presentations from the Resource person and the next three days programme was a series of CBSG-style Working Groups featuring all the elements of planning, implementing and following up wild to wild translocations. With the information gained at the workshop, a guideline or manual for conducting wild to wild translocations will be prepared.

Some of the most experienced Hoolock Gibbon researchers in India and Bangladesh participated and were generous with information about Hoolocks and their habitats and local conditions. Dr. Jayantha Das, Dr. Jihosuo Biswas, Dr. Rekha Medhi Chetry, and Dr. Dilip Chetry of India, Dr. Anwar Islam, and Gawsia Chowdhury of Bangladesh and their organisations collaborated with the Forest Department of Assam and Zoo Outreach Organisation to make the workshop meaningful. A dozen young field biologists volunteered helping with logistics, transport, photography, preparation and a host of other tasks.

This is a short summary of the workshop. In subsequent issues more details will be forthcoming.

