

An Ape in Our Forests

Hoolock Gibbons (Ketsahe-Ang)

The Hoolock Gibbons (Western hoolock and Eastern Hoolock), also known as Hoolocks or White Browed Gibbons, are two primate species from the family of the gibbons (Hylobatidae). In Nagaland, it occurs in much depleted numbers and is found Intanki National Park and Fakim Wildlife Sanctuary and the Singphan Reserved Forest, but has disappeared from Pulie Badze and Rangapahar wildlife sanctuaries.



Hoolocks are the second largest of the gibbons, after the Siamang. They reach a size of 60 to 90 cm and weigh 6 to 9 kg. The sexes are about the same size, but they differ considerably in coloration: males are black coloured with remarkable white brows, while females have a grey-brown fur, which is darker at the chest and neck. White rings around the eyes and around the mouth give their face a mask-like appearance.

With long and slender arms, hoolock gibbons are swift creatures, barely needing to step on the ground. They swing from tree to tree in a mode of locomotion known as Brachiation, and can brachiate at speeds upto 55 km/hr, covering upto six meters in just one swing! Very less study has been conducted on the behavior and habitat of the eastern hoolock, though they are considered similar to their cousins with variations in diet depending on their ranges. Their diet comprises mainly of fruits, but they sometimes also consume leaves, shoots and flowers. Males and females are of similar size, but can be differentiated easily by the coloration of their dense hair. Males are black with a distinctive white brow, while females are copper-tan with dark brown hair on the sides of their face, and a clear central parting in the head hair. They form monogamous pairs that remain together for years, though mating outside the pair has been noticed in some individuals. Hoolocks are famous for their emotive call that echoes across long distances in the forest, and is used by individuals to attract mates. Females give birth to one offspring every 2-3 years, and it remains within the family group for 7-10 years. Young hoolocks are born after a seven months gestation, with a milky white or buff colored hair. After about six months the hair of males will darken and turn black, while

the female hair remains buff colored throughout her life. After 8 to 9 years they are fully mature and their fur reaches its final coloration. Their life expectancy in the wild is about 25 years.

Like the other gibbons, they are diurnal and arboreal, brachiating through the trees with their long arms. They live together in monogamous pairs, which stake out a territory. Their calls serve to locate family members and ward off other gibbons from their territory. Their diet consists mainly of fruits, insects and leaves.

There are two species of Hoolock:

Western Hoolock Gibbon, *Hoolock hoolock*

Eastern Hoolock Gibbon, *Hoolock leuconedys*

The western hoolock gibbon (*Hoolock hoolock*) occurs in India (south of the southern bank of the River Dibang-Brahmaputra in the eight northeastern states), Bangladesh and Myanmar and China. Here we report new information that extends the known range of the eastern hoolock gibbon in India. *Hoolock leuconedys* was found in Koraonu circle in the lower Dibang Valley district beyond its previously known range in the Lohit district, Arunachal Pradesh.



Of the two, the western hoolock is listed as Endangered in the IUCN Redlist, while the eastern hoolock is listed as Vulnerable, and both species population have been declining due to habitat destruction of various forms and hunting of meat.

The gibbon is nowhere abundant due to hunting and, except a few protected areas, it is found in scattered groups, where their survival is doubtful in the long term. Habitat destruction and fragmentation and poaching are the main threats. The creation of more protected areas, adequate protection of existing protected areas, control of *jhum* cultivation and poaching, and awareness and involvement of churches and village headmen in conservation are recommended.

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