

Eastern Black Crested Gibbon

Nomascus nasutus (Kunkel d'Herculais, 1884)

China, Vietnam

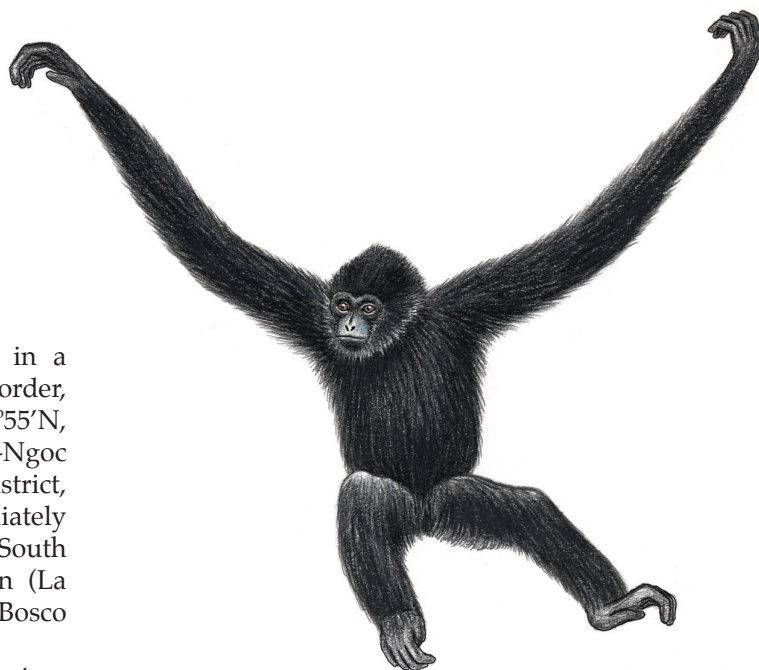
(2008)

Long Yongcheng & Tilo Nadler

The eastern black crested gibbon occurs in a very restricted area along the Sino-Vietnam border, comprising only about 48 km², around 22°55'N, 106°30'E, including the northern Phong Nam-Ngoc Khe forests (about 30 km²) of Trung Khanh District, Cao Bang Province, Vietnam, and an immediately adjacent area (about 18 km²) in Jingxi County in South China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (La Quang Trung and Trinh Dinh Hoang 2004; Chan Bosco Pui Lok *et al.* 2008).

In the past, the species was believed to comprise two subspecies (*N. nasutus nasutus* and *N. n. hainanus*), the first occurring in Vietnam and the second on China's Hainan Island. Both have now been elevated to full species, based initially on differences in territorial calls and fur coloration (La Quang Trung and Trinh Dinh Hoang 2004), but supported by genetic data (Roos *et al.* 2007). At the 2006 Asian Primate Red List Workshop in Cambodia, both were recognized as distinct species (Geissmann 2007; Chan *et al.* 2008). The historical range of the eastern black crested gibbon was east of the Red River in China and Vietnam. It was thought to have gone extinct over its historical range in mainland China (Tan 1985), but was rediscovered recently in Bangliang Limestone Forest in Jingxi County; the population was estimated at 19 individuals, living in three groups (Chan Bosco Pui Lok *et al.* 2008). In Vietnam, it was also feared extinct until scientists from Fauna and Flora International (FFI) rediscovered a population in the limestone forest of Phong Nam-Ngoc Khe Communes in the northernmost Trung Khanh District, Cao Bang Province, northeast Vietnam, along the border with Guangxi. The population was estimated to be 26 individuals in at least five groups, based on a survey conducted in August 2002 (Geissmann *et al.* 2002, 2003), and 37 individuals in 8 groups in a survey in September 2004 (Trinh Dinh Hoang 2004). Based on simultaneous surveys in September 2007 on both sides of the border, the total population of the gibbon is around 110 individuals living in 18 groups (Le Trong Dat *et al.* 2008). Thus, the species should be listed as Critically Endangered.

Nomascus nasutus inhabits lower montane and



limestone forests in a wet tropical monsoon climate at elevations of 500–900 m (Geissmann *et al.* 2000). The main threat to this species, given its restricted range, is habitat loss and disturbance. The habitat of *N. nasutus* is in danger of being cleared for cultivation, pasture for livestock, and firewood collection by local Vietnamese, as well as charcoal-production by local Vietnamese and Chinese. The species is also endangered from problems intrinsic to small population size such as inbreeding effects, poor mate-choice, and human or natural disaster (La Quang Trung and Trinh Dinh Hoang 2004).

Conservation efforts on this species have been initiated in China since its rediscovery two years ago. Work on a proposed nature reserve to protect the gibbons, including comprehensive surveys and official document preparation, is now in progress, and the reserve will soon be in place. As for its conservation in Vietnam, Fauna and Flora International (FFI), along with Cao Bang FPD, is spearheading the establishment of a Species Conservation Area and a joint forest protection system that involves communities, a ranger force, and border patrol. FFI is also partnering with the Cao Bang Rural Development Project to encourage sustainability and conservation education and research in the local communities of the region (La Quang Trung and Trinh Dinh Hoang 2004). There is an urgent need to integrate the conservation efforts of both countries if the species is to be saved.

References

- Chan Bosco Pui Lok, Tan Xue-feng and Tan Wu-jing. 2008. Rediscovery of the critically endangered eastern black-crested gibbon *Nomascus nasutus* (Hylobatidae) in China, with preliminary notes on population size, ecology and conservation status. *Asian Primates Journal* 1(1): 17–25.
- Geissmann, T. 2007. Status reassessment of the gibbons: results of the Asian Primate Red List Workshop 2006. *Gibbon Journal* (3): 5–15.
- Geissmann, T., Dang X. Nguyen, N. Lormée and F. Momberg. 2000. *Vietnam Primate Conservation Status Review 2000. Part 1: Gibbons*. Fauna and Flora International, Indochina Programme, Hanoi.
- Geissmann, T., La Quang Trung, Trinh Dinh Hoang, Dang Ngoc Can, Pham Duc Tien and Vu Dinh Thong. 2002. Report on an Overall survey of the Cao Vit Gibbon Population (*Nomascus* sp. cf. *nasutus*) in Trung Khanh District, Cao Bang Province (Second Overall Survey). Report, Fauna and Flora International, Asia Pacific Programme, Hanoi, Vietnam. 8pp. Website: <<http://www.gibbons.de>>.
- Geissmann, T., La Quang Trung, Trinh Dinh Hoang, Vu Dinh Thong, Dang Ngoc Can and Pham Duc Tien. 2003. Rarest ape rediscovered in Vietnam. *Asian Primates* 8(3/4): 8–10.
- La Quang Trung and Trinh Dinh Hoang. 2004. Status review of the Cao Vit black crested gibbon (*Nomascus nasutus nasutus*) in Vietnam. In: *Conservation of Primates in Vietnam*, T. Nadler, U. Streicher and Ha Thang Long (eds.), pp.90–94. Frankfurt Zoological Society, Hanoi.
- Le Trong Dat, Fan Pengfei, Yan Lu, Le Huu Oanh Nguyen The Cuong and J. Kempinski 2008. Census Report for the Global Cao Vit Gibbon (*Nomascus nasutus*) Population. Report, Fauna and Flora International, Vietnam and China Programmes.
- Nadler, T. 2003. Rediscovery of the eastern black crested gibbon *Nomascus nasutus* in Vietnam. *The Gibbon's Voice* 6(1): 1–3.
- Roos, C., Vu Ngoc Thanh, L. Walter and T. Nadler, 2007. Molecular systematics of Indochinese primates. *Vietnamese Journal of Primatology* 1(1): 41–53.
- Tan, B. 1985. The status of primates in China. *Primate Conservation* (5): 63–81.
- Trinh Dinh Hoang. 2004. Gibbon monitoring survey and training in Trung Khanh, Cao Bang Province. Report, Fauna and Flora International – Vietnam Programme, Hanoi.