

Press Release

Tripura workshop aims to work out conservation action plan for Hoolock Gibbon

Guwahati, January 11: In order to generate conservation tempo to secure Hoolock Gibbon population in Tripura in Northeast India as well as facilitate future planning a 3-day workshop has been set in motion on Hoolock gibbon Conservation Action Plan in Agartala today.

The 3-workshop during January 10-12 is being organised by Aaranyak-a scientific and industrial research organisation with a mission of carrying out research, training and conservation activities in Northeast India, in collaboration with Tripura University and Tripura Forest Department and with support Tripura Biodiversity Board, IUCN small section & IUCN primate specialist group.

The Workshop was inaugurated today by Principal Chief Conservator of Forest, and Head of Forest Force, Government of Tripura. The three-day consultative workshop aims to formulate the strategic action plan 2024-2030 for the conservation of Western Hoolock Gibbon in Tripura. It was inaugurated in the Conference Hall of Tripura University.

Around 200 participant including officials from Tripura Forest Department, members of NGOs, students, research scholars and experts from northeast region have registered for the purpose.

The Western Hoolock Gibbon (*Hoolock hoolock*) are distributed in northeast India. Their distribution in India is limited to the seven states of northeast India on the southern bank of the Dibang – Brahmaputra river system. Tripura is one of the potential habitat of the endangered species.

Unfortunately, encroachment, habitat fragmentation and hunting are the major threats to gibbons in Tripura. Added to this situation is the lack of basic information and poor conservation awareness about the species in different sections of the people of the Tripura Forest Department, which is yet another major hindrance in the conservation of the species.

Welcoming the stakeholders, Prof. Sabyasachi Dasgupta, Department of Forestry & Biodiversity, Tripura University briefed about the purpose of the workshop and background of the conservation issues about the particular species, the only ape found in northeast India.

Prof. Ganga Prasad Prasain, the Vice Chancellor of Tripura University shared his knowledge about the forests and wildlife in Manipur to underscore the decline of population of wild animals in general and Hoolock Gibbon in particular.

Dr. Deepak Sharma, Registrar of Tripura University referred this workshop as a landmark event for the university as well as the sustainable development at large. He expected that the workshop would fructify in significant outcome.

In his deliberation, Dr. Dilip Chetry, Vice President of Aaranyak, and a senior primatologist and head, elaborated about primate diversity in general and Hoolock Gibbon in particular.

He said, "Out of the 24 species of non-human primates in India, 13 species are found in northeast India, and Tripura harbours eight species. Only 10 Asian countries in the world possess Hoolock Gibbon, and India is one of them. This species is endangered and only few individuals have been surviving in India. Therefore, it is urgent need to take action plan to conserve this species as a flagship species by which other wild animals will also be conserved."

Dr. Chetry gave some examples of conservation efforts in the past from his own experiences and said that similar consultative workshop was successful in Nagaland last year. Already landscape level conservation approach has been initiated by Aaranyak in this regard. Dr. Chetry, who is also one of the members in IUCN special group of Primate conservation and an executive committee member of the Global Gibbon Network explained the objectives of the workshop.

P. L. Agrawal, IFS, the PCCF & CWLW Government of Tripura and the Guest of Honour of the inaugural meeting, emphasized on conservation the natural habitat for Hoolock Gibbon in Tripura which has been threatened by deforestation and illegal hunting. "The corridors must be revived and specific suggestions are required for the plantation in the buffer zones, he said hoping that community based conservation policy with collaborative efforts among government, non-government organizations and academic institutions could address this issue.

The chief guest Dr. Avinash Kanfode, IFS, the PCCF & Head of the Forest Force, Government of Tripura highlighted that from evolutionary point of view, Hoolock Gibbon is our nearest relative, we have a moral responsibility to conserve the species. He shared experience of 30 years about the wildlife conservation scenario in Tripura and held men responsible for dwindling population of wild animals. He stressed that both in-situ and ex-situ conservation efforts have to be undertaken. He opined that population monitoring, habitat restoration, sensitization of law enforcing agencies and

scientific research should be operated together in conservation of wild species, particularly for Hoolock Gibbon.

Offering the vote of thanks, Prof. B. K. Datta. Dean, Science, Tripura University cited some examples from his experiences about the wildlife existed in Tripura in recent past.

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