

PRESS RELEASE

Aaranyak-Assam Forest trains another batch of forest field staff on Hoolock gibbon conservation

Guwahati, February 1: With objectives to address challenges and inculcate a conservation mindset, Aaranyak, a leading organisation dedicated to research, training, and conservation in Northeast India, organised a series of specialised training programmes on conservation of Hoolock gibbon in collaboration with the Assam Forest Department.

The initiative is supported by The Habitats Trust and the Primate Specialist Group of International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The Western Hoolock gibbon (*Hoolock hoolock*), often referred to as the "Ape of India" inhabits the seven north-eastern states of India, primarily on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra River and east of the Debang River.

Unfortunately, poaching, habitat fragmentation, and encroachment pose significant threats to this endangered primate. Compounding these challenges is the limited awareness of Hoolock gibbon conservation strategies among different sectors of the public, including frontline forest staff.

“The week-long residential course focused on equipping forest frontline staff with essential skills and knowledge for Hoolock gibbon conservation. Key topics included -- biodiversity and conservation in Northeast India, Primate conservation with a special focus on the Hoolock gibbon, Gibbon census and population estimation techniques, data collection, reporting, and habitat monitoring, floristic studies and habitat restoration, Gibbon rescue and rehabilitation, GPS use in fieldwork, legal orientation on wildlife laws and their applications,” informs Dr Dilip Chetry, Senior Primatologist and Head of Aaranyak’s Primate Research and Conservation Division.

Daily lectures were complemented by extensive field exercises, providing participants hands-on experience in conservation research methods.

The 8th batch of the training programme was held at the Gibbon Conservation Centre of Aaranyak in Hollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary, Mariani, Assam. Thirteen forest guards, including four female and nine male guards from forest divisions mainly Doomdomma, Digboi, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, and Jorhat—participated in the programme.

Nandha Kumar, Divisional Forest Officer of the Jorhat Forest Division, inaugurated the programme on January 23, encouraging participants to engage fully and apply their learning in the field. He expressed gratitude to Aaranyak for their dedicated efforts in training newly recruited frontline staff.

The training featured lectures and field exercises conducted by distinguished experts, including -- Dr. I.C. Baruah of Assam Agricultural University, Ajoy Kumar Das, Advocate of Gauhati High Court, Gunin Saikia, Former Deputy Conservator of Forest, Jiten Goswami, Former Range Officer, Mridu Paban Phukan of Wildlife Conservation & Study Centre.

Aaranyak experts Avisekh Sarkar, Akshay Kumar Upadhyaya, Nandita Medhi, Dr. Pranjal Das, and Dr. Dilip Chetry also trained the trainees.

Dr Dilip Chetry chaired the convocation on January 29. He acknowledged the support of the Assam Forest Department, particularly the Jorhat Forest Division, and the local community for facilitating the programme.

The training concluded with the distribution of study materials, including a training manual, books on Hoolock gibbons, posters, participation certificates, and group photographs. The DFO Nandha Kumar emphasised the importance of applying the knowledge gained to protect habitats and conserve the Hoolock gibbon. He expressed his appreciation for Aaranyak's continued efforts in capacity building for Assam Forest Department staff, underscoring the critical role such initiatives play in the conservation of this endangered species.

(For more information, please contact Dr. Dilip Chetry (9435043892/dilip@aaranyak.org), Head, Primate Research and Conservation Division, Aaranyak)

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