

**Technical session on
regional cooperation for
conservation of primates
in transboundary
landscapes, particularly in
the Far Eastern Himalayan
Landscape**

7th Asian Primate Symposium

5–14 February 2020, Guwahati, India



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PROCEEDINGS OF THE

Technical session on regional cooperation for conservation of primates in transboundary landscapes, particularly in the Far Eastern Himalayan Landscape

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Abbreviations

FFI	Fauna and Flora International
HKH	Hindu Kush Himalaya
HI-LIFE	Landscape Initiative for the Far Eastern Himalaya
ICIMOD	International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
NERIST	North Eastern Regional Institute of Science and Technology
NWCD	Nature Wildlife and Conservation Division

Background

The broad post-2020 goal of Transboundary Landscapes – a regional programme implemented by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) – is to ensure the sustainability of landscapes using the principles of landscape ecology, connectivity conservation, and ecosystems restoration, and to find innovative nature-based solutions to manage the complex social and ecological systems across borders. Managing trade-offs and restoration is critical for integrating ecosystem services across landscapes as fragmentation of habitats and land use change poses a serious threat to biodiversity worldwide.

Protected area networks are transboundary by nature. Hindu Kush Himalayan (HKH) countries need to develop a new conservation paradigm that takes into account the impacts of climate change on biodiversity and wildlife habitats across countries.

Challenges bring opportunities for research, coordination across borders, and bring the focus and attention back to transboundary landscape management.

The Far Eastern Himalayan Landscape stretches across Northeast India, North Myanmar, and West Yunnan of China, which share ecological, historical, cultural, and socioeconomic features. As one of the most biologically important places on earth, the landscape is home to a wide range of primates, including endangered and endemic primates such as the Myanmar snub-nosed monkey (*Rhinopithecus strykeri*) and the hoolock gibbon (*Hoolock hoolock*), which are on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List.

ICIMOD has been implementing the Landscape Initiative for the Far Eastern Himalaya (HI-LIFE) – under the Regional Programme on Transboundary Landscapes – to promote transboundary collaboration in conservation and development across China, India, and Myanmar, in collaboration with the respective governments and partner organizations.

In October 2018, experts and protected area managers from China, India, and Myanmar participated in the 6th Asian Primate Symposium held in Dali, China. The participants agreed that there was a need to strengthen regional collaboration to address cross-border issues through joint research, information and data sharing, and collaborative law enforcement.

ICIMOD along with its partners from India and Myanmar participated in the 7th Asian Primate Symposium and organized a technical session on 9 February 2020. This forum sought to increase regional cooperation among member countries and exchange information on the conservation status of primates, particularly gibbons and snub-nosed monkeys, monitoring of population trends, and the need to halt biodiversity loss and land degradation and other ecosystems. ICIMOD also supported emerging professionals from India and Myanmar for the pre-symposium training from 5 to 7 February 2020 and organized a field visit to Kaziranga National Park and Hollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary in Assam.

Prior to the symposium, a photo contest with the theme “Primates in the Far Eastern Himalaya” was organized, and the winners were announced during ICIMOD’s event.

Objectives

This technical session aligned with regional events centred on wildlife conservation and also ICIMOD’s HKH Call to Action, which has nine mountain priorities. Two actions listed below particularly resonate with Transboundary Landscapes and HI-LIFE:

Action 6: Halt biodiversity loss and land degradation and sustainably manage forests and other ecosystems in the mountains to enhance ecosystem resilience for sustained flow of services.

Action 9: Promote a mountain-specific agenda for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals through increased regional cooperation among and between mountain regions and nations.

The 2019 *Hindu Kush Himalaya Assessment* report and [HKH Call to Action](#) clearly define a new approach and strategy for transboundary landscapes in the HKH region. HI-LIFE is committed to fostering collaboration for the management and restoration of transboundary landscapes in keeping with global commitments such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and Sustainable Development Goals.

The goals of the technical session were as follows:

- Strengthen collaboration among researchers and protected area managers in the 7th Asian Primate Symposium
- Develop action plans for the publication of a scientific journal article based on the presentations and a picture series book on primate species richness

Final outcomes

- The technical session enhanced understanding and facilitated knowledge sharing among experts, focal agencies, and partners
- Strategic collaboration with partners in understanding standards and monitoring protocols, and agreement on common methodology and approaches
- Agreement on contributing to primate species richness picture series book and journal article

Highlights

- About 100 participants from around the world participated in the main event from 8–10 February 2020.
- The technical session on “Regional cooperation for conservation of primates in transboundary landscapes, particularly in the Far Eastern Himalayan Landscape” was organized on 9 February 2020. About 84 delegates including primatologists, researchers, academics and policy makers from around the world, mainly from Asia, participated in the event.
- A total of seven presentations were made during the session starting with an introduction to ICIMOD and HI-LIFE.
- Following the presentations, there was a panel discussion among renowned primatologists working across India and Myanmar. They talked about the information gap, action protocols, and possible collaboration for the conservation of primates.
- The winners of the photo contest along with the top ten candidates were announced at the end of the session and the winning entries were displayed in the exhibition hall, which became one of the highlights of the symposium.

Opening session

Nawraj Pradhan, ICIMOD, welcomed the participants to ICIMOD's session and emphasized that the event and the following discussion would provide an opportunity for the primatologists from different organizations to get a deeper understanding of transboundary issues and develop an action protocol for the conservation of primates. He then introduced ICIMOD and its landscape initiatives across the HKH, followed by a description of the key features of HI-LIFE. He concluded his presentation by highlighting the expected outcomes of the side event.

Technical session

Kesang Wangchuk, ICIMOD, gave the first scientific presentation focusing on primates in the transboundary landscape of the Eastern Himalaya. He started with the description of the role of primates in the regulation of the ecosystem structure, function, and resilience and human-primate conflicts. In his conclusion, he highlighted the urgency of transboundary cooperation and collaboration among countries.

KEY MESSAGES

- Primates are distributed across and along the political boundaries of more than one country, which results in human-primate conflicts across transboundary landscapes.
- There is a need for transboundary cooperation and collaboration among countries for the mitigation of conflict and conservation of primates, for which ICIMOD can provide the necessary support and platform.

Dilip Chetry, Aaranyak, India, elaborated on the status of primates in Far Eastern Himalayan Landscape of India. He talked about areas covered by the Far Eastern Himalaya Landscape of India

and the distribution of primates along national parks, wildlife sanctuary, reserve forests, and also village/community. He discussed the conservation status of primates in the Far Eastern Himalaya, focusing on key features, distribution, ecological role and the importance of the hoolock gibbon in India. He drew attention to different threats to the gibbon population, information and research gaps, and the need to promote conservation of primates, particularly the hoolock gibbon.

KEY MESSAGES

- Among the ten primate species found in the Far Eastern Himalaya Landscape, two species of hoolock gibbon (eastern hoolock gibbon and western hoolock gibbon) have been placed on the IUCN Red List, as vulnerable species and endangered species respectively.
- The hoolock gibbon is a flagship species of the landscape and has an important ecological role defined by its association with other primate species and mammals.
- However, gibbons face numerous threats like human-induced habitat degradation and habitat fragmentation, mining, and hunting. These factors have reduced their population in reserve forests, private land and community areas, leading towards their extinction in some areas.
- There are gaps in information on their distribution, status, and socio-ecological and genetic properties.
- Education and awareness, research interventions, community-based conservation, habitat restoration and international transboundary collaboration are some of the recommended actions for the conservation of primates, particularly the hoolock gibbon in the Far Eastern Himalaya Landscape.

Aung Ko Lin, Fauna and Flora International (FFI), Myanmar, presented on species distribution and the conservation status of Snub-nosed Monkey in the Far Eastern Himalayan Landscape in Myanmar. He talked about the proposed Imawbum National Park of Myanmar, where eight species of primates are recorded, one of which is the threatened flagship species Myanmar snub-nosed monkey.

KEY MESSAGES

- Some legal protection measures are being proposed for the conservation of the snub-nosed monkey and other endangered species in Myanmar.
- Human activities like logging, bushmeat trade, over-extraction of non-timber forest products, and commercial wildlife trade across borders are major threats to the survival of snub-nosed monkeys.
- Political instability, inaccessibility, and remoteness make research difficult in these areas, leading to gaps in knowledge about primate species.
- Transboundary collaboration for protected area management and biodiversity conservation are urgently required to develop joint monitoring and patrolling systems for mitigating cross-border poaching, wildlife trade, and illegal logging.
- Other recommendations include research interventions, transboundary support, and collaboration for future research, implementation of integrated conservation and development programmes, and monitoring of the impact of interventions.

Awadesh Kumar, North Eastern Regional Institute of Science and Technology (NERIST), India, gave an overview of the distribution and conservation of the capped langur in the Eastern Himalayas of Arunachal Pradesh, Northeast India. He talked about primate diversity of India, its distribution, population status, feeding ecology, threats and conservation challenges. In the end he highlighted the information gap, research challenges, and a way forward for the conservation of the species.

KEY MESSAGES

- The Eastern Himalayan region in India is a global biodiversity hotspot and one of the primate-rich areas of the world, both in terms of species diversity and population abundances.
- The capped langur ranges across 53 protected areas of the north-east states of India, and is listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.
- Major threats to the capped langur are habitat loss and degradation, hunting and poaching, habitat fragmentation, and overlapping plant utilization.

- Ethno-zoological uses of the capped langur have increased hunting pressure on the species.
- Information on the current population, distribution status, and potential habitat of the capped langur is lacking because of research challenges like inadequate funds and human resources.
- There is a need for collaboration among different institutions and countries for a long-term detailed study on distribution, population status, potential habitats, resources mapping, and food regeneration status, along with efforts to educate and raise the awareness of local communities in and around the capped langur's habitat.

Nay Zar Soe, Nature Wildlife and Conservation Division (NWCD), Forest Department, Myanmar, presented the findings of the eastern hoolock gibbon survey in Htamanthi Wildlife Sanctuary of the Far Eastern Himalaya in Myanmar. He started with an introduction, species distribution, and monitoring sites, followed by findings of the survey. He concluded with the threats and the way forward for the conservation of the eastern hoolock gibbon of Myanmar.

KEY MESSAGES

- Myanmar Forest Complex is home to three gibbon species. However, gibbons of Myanmar remain largely unstudied.
- Threat analysis for the hoolock gibbon revealed that hunting, legal and illegal logging, and small-scale illegal mining around the protected areas have posed major threats to the survival of gibbons, which are now in the category of endangered species.
- The conservation of gibbons in the Eastern Himalaya can be achieved through environmental education and awareness among indigenous communities along with their participation in conservation actions; studies on behavioral ecology; and enhanced collaboration among HI-LIFE and Asian partner countries for research and monitoring, capacity building and awareness, alternative livelihood and exchange of regional expertise, experiences, innovations, and best practices.

Panel discussion

After the presentations, Nawraj Pradhan, ICIMOD, moderated a panel discussion with six experts from India, Myanmar, and FFI. The discussion was focused on transboundary issues and opportunities for possible collaboration and action plans in the conservation of flagship primate species in the Far Eastern Himalaya.

PANEL MEMBERS

Name of the panelist	Affiliation
Dilip Chetry	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Vice President, AaranyakHead, Primate Research and Conservation Division
Frank Momberg	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Regional Director for Programme Development, Asia-Pacific Programme Technical Advisor, FFI, Myanmar Programme
Awadesh Kumar	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Associate Professor, NERIST, Arunachal Pradesh, India
Bharat Bhusan Bhatt	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Research Officer, O/O, PCCF (WL & BD), Arunachal Pradesh, India
Nay Zar Soe	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ranger, Nature and Wildlife Conservation Division, Forest Department, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation, Myanmar
Oliver Wearn	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Technical Advisor – Vietnam Programme, FFI

KEY MESSAGES FROM THE PANEL DISCUSSION

- Gaps in information on population status, habitat potential and distribution should be filled through collaborative research and action plans of different institutions and countries, and exchange of knowledge and ideas among scientists to develop standardized protocols and methods. ICIMOD can provide a platform for this.

- Institutions and countries use different methods and approaches and there is a need to develop common regional and monitoring protocols.
- Platforms like this provide a holistic understanding of the subject and help build the capacity of government officials from non-scientific backgrounds.
- The Forest Department of Arunachal Pradesh will provide support to young professionals and researchers who will study primates and other types of biodiversity of Arunachal forests. This will allow HI-LIFE and the Forest Department to jointly build the capacity of young professionals and field researchers.
- Opportunities will be provided for transboundary collaboration and trainings of forestry officials through ICIMOD.
- ICIMOD looks forward to collaborating with organizations in China, India, and Myanmar to develop common research methodologies and standard protocol for monitoring flagship species including primates in the Far Eastern Himalaya.

Photo contest

The Far Eastern Himalayan Landscape harbours diverse species of primates. A month before the event, HI-LIFE made a call for entries for a photo contest with the theme “Primates of the Far Eastern Himalaya”. The winners were announced during ICIMOD’s session at the 7th Asian Primate Symposium on 9 February 2020. The objective of the photo contest was to shine a light on the unique features, behaviours, habitats, and lives of the primate species with the ultimate aim of producing a picture series book of primates. Altogether, 58 entries were received for the photo contest. A panel of experts from ICIMOD reviewed the entries and selected the top three entries; there was a tie between two entries for the third position. The selected entries can be viewed [here](#).

Post-symposium field visit

A post-symposium field visit to Kaziranga National Park and Hollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary was organized with ICIMOD’s support for the participants.

Kaziranga National Park

Kaziranga National Park, located across Golaghat, Karbi Anglong, and Nagaon districts of the Indian state of Assam, hosts two-thirds of the world’s great one-horned rhinoceroses, accounting for the population of about 2,400. It is a World Heritage Site and is home to other important wildlife species like tigers, several species of deer, elephants, water buffalo and also several species of birds.

Participants went on a safari trip in the national park, where they observed rhinos, deer, wild hen, elephant, and several species of migratory and resident birds.

One of the issues faced by the park is that the highway cuts through the park, sometimes causing road accidents that kill wild animals. Human–elephant conflict is also a major issue in the protected area.

Hollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary

Hollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary is an isolated protected area of evergreen forest located in Jorhat, Assam, India. It is home to the only gibbons in India: the hoolock gibbon and the Bengal slow loris (Northeast India’s only nocturnal primate). There are other species of primates like stump-tailed macaque and capped langur, and other wildlife species like leopards, wild elephants, and deer.

Participants walked inside the forest of Hollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary, where they sighted primate species in their natural habitat, including the hoolock gibbon, stump-tailed macaque, capped langur, etc.

Hollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary only covers 21 square kilometers but is home to more than 50 wild elephants. As a result human–elephant conflicts are common in the surrounding villages. Another issue is the fragmentation of the protected area by tea gardens and the railway tract, which has had several negative impacts on the wild fauna. Even during the visit, participants observed the primates being scared when the train passed by.

Key achievements

- Participants from India and Myanmar greatly appreciated the pre-symposium training supported by ICIMOD. They mentioned that the capacity-building training enhanced their skills and research techniques as the trainers were renowned primatologists.
- Agreement on strategic collaboration and action plans for developing a scientific journal and book on primate species richness in the Far Eastern Himalayan Landscape.
- FFI representatives from Vietnam, Myanmar, and Thailand showed keen interest in ICIMOD’s Regional Programme on Transboundary Landscapes and in future collaborations with HI-LIFE.
- The top 10 entries of the photo contest were displayed in the poster presentation hall. The exhibit became a highlight of the symposium. ICIMOD has a database of photos by professional photographers from the region, which will help us collaborate with partners for a wildlife species richness book for HI-LIFE.

Key recommendations and follow-up actions

- Update Chinese participants on the outcomes of the side event, as their absence was a void in the regional discussions for HI-LIFE
- Explore strategic collaborations with FFI, as they are already working across Vietnam, Myanmar, and China, and develop a common research methodology and monitoring protocol for the snub-nosed monkey
- Explore opportunities for collaboration between the forest departments of India and Myanmar in order to create a regional platform for sharing information on primates and other flagship species
- Map existing monitoring sites and develop a standardized action protocol for regional cooperation for conservation of primates in HI-LIFE
- Publish scientific articles based on the scientific presentations made during the ICIMOD session
- Publish a picture series book on primates of the Eastern Himalaya, including the photo entries from the photo competition

Annex 1: Programme agenda

Time	Programme	Resource person
15:00–15:10	Introducing ICIMOD and HI-LIFE	Nawraj Pradhan, ICIMOD
15:10–15:25	Primates in the transboundary landscape of the Far Eastern Himalayas	Kesang Wangchuk, ICIMOD
15:25–15:40	Species distribution and conservation status of hoolock gibbons in the Far East Himalayan Landscape in India	Dilip Chetry, Aaranyak, India
15:40–15:55	Species distribution and conservation status of snub-nosed monkey in the Far East Himalayan Landscape in Myanmar	Aung Ko Lin, FFI, Myanmar
15:55–16:10	Species distribution and conservation status of capped langur in Far East Himalayan Landscape in India	Awadesh Kumar, NERIST, Arunachal Pradesh, India
16:10–16:25	Species distribution and conservation status of hoolock gibbons in the Far East Himalayan landscape in Myanmar	Nay Zar Soe, Forest Department, NWCD, Myanmar
16:25–16:55	Discussion: Information gap, action protocol, joint collaboration and journals, and resolutions	ICIMOD, Myanmar, India, and international experts
16:55–17:00	Announcement of photo contest prizes	

Annex 2: Symposium participants supported by ICIMOD

No.	Name of participant	Country	Organization	Date of participation
1	Aung Ko Lin	Myanmar	FFI, Myanmar	5–13 February 2020
2	Nay Zar Soe	Myanmar	NWCD, Forest Department, Myanmar	8–10 February 2020
3	Than Zaw Min	Myanmar	Forest Department, Myanmar	8–10 February 2020
4	Frank Momberg	Myanmar	FFI, Myanmar	8–10 February 2020
5	Bharat Bhusan Bhatt	India	Forest Department, Arunachal Pradesh	8–10 February 2020
6	Anoko Mega	India	AMMS, India	5–13 February 2020
7	Mriganka Shekhar Sarkar	India	NERC, GBPIHED, India	8–10 February 2020
8	Awadesh Kumar	India	NERIST, India	9–10 February 2020
9	Rabindra Sharma	India	Kaziranga National Park, Assam	5–7 February 2020
10	Jyotishman Deka	India	Manas Tiger Project	5–7 February 2020
11	Nawraj Pradhan	India	ICIMOD	8–10 February 2020
12	Kesang Wangchuk	Bhutan	ICIMOD	8–13 February 2020
13	Lily Shrestha	Nepal	ICIMOD	8–13 February 2020

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