

Project Report

Title	Preliminary status review for <i>Hylobates lar carpenteri</i> in Thailand	
Location	Mae Hong Son, and Chiang Mai provinces, Northwest Thailand	
Date and duration	October 2012 to October 2013	
Donor	Gibbon Conservation Alliance (GCA)	
Technical and financial guidance	People and Resources Conservation Foundation	
Implemented by	Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN), to be implemented by the WISE Foundation with technical support from the People Resources and Conservation Foundation (PRCF). HNCC is a local group comprising villagers from Ban Huoi Som Poi and Ban Khun Tae that cooperated in the surveys under the WISE network of Karen Community-based Organizations.	
Participants	Facilitators = 2 male, 1 female Local participants = 20 survey team members 80 village meeting participants	
Total budget	THB: 134,635.29	Swiss Francs

1. Background

This report details the survey, planning, and community mobilization activities for the conservation of Carpenter's White-handed Gibbon *Hylobates lar carpenteri* in northwest Thailand in 2013 by the Wise Foundation/ Karen Environmental and Social Action Network. Activities described herein were funded through a generous donation by Gibbon Conservation Alliance (GCA), comprising the total project budget. In kind contributions were provided by People Resources and Conservation Foundation

The status of the northern sub-species of *Hylobates lar* is not currently known, although it seems to be almost entirely restricted to northern Thailand. Initial desk-based research by the project proponents (Mesher and Grindley, 2010) indicated that few areas in the northeast of Thailand retained significant numbers of gibbons, but more pockets remain in the northwest.

A survey of Hoolock Gibbon in Karen state in 2010 (Saw Blaw Htoo and Grindley 2010) indicated a strong prohibition on hunting gibbons among ethnic Karen in Burma and this seems to be confirmed by what little work has been done investigating hunting practices among the Thai Karen; Steinmetz and Mather (1996), for example, "found no reason to contradict Karen claims about never harming gibbons" (p. 32). Karen people themselves believe they have a strong cultural link with gibbons (see Box), and current evidence does not contradict this.

The Thai Karen are primarily distributed in the northwest of Thailand, in precisely the area where we believe the largest number of *H. l. carpenteri* survive. This seeming link with ethnicity finds more support from the observation that ethnic H'mong, who have a strong hunting culture, inhabit areas in the northeast of Thailand. Indeed, the Thai H'mong seem not to share with their Laos counterparts



Fig 1. Initial consultations in target villages. Project leader Waiying can be seen on the far left of the left-hand picture.

the belief that gibbons are forest spirits and therefore should not be killed Tungittiaplakorn & Dearden (2002).

To begin to establish the distribution of gibbons in northwest Thailand, a telephone survey (Appendix 1) was conducted with 35 Thai-Karen villages within the network of a local Karen community based organization: WISE Foundation. All the villages surveyed were in Chiang Mai province, and the results have allowed us to begin mapping possible gibbon locations (Appendix 2).

This data supplemented meagre records from Mae Hong Son province to the north, and elsewhere in the range of the taxa within Thailand (see Mesher and Grindley, 2010). It provided strong evidence for a number of locations suitable for the long-term protection of the species. The current project sought to conduct field surveys, and to mobilize community conservation initiatives in these areas should they prove to retain viable gibbon populations. By involving Thai Karen communities in this research we explicitly aimed to will build on their existing relationship with the species, and to make the project as inclusive as possible.

2. Aims and objectives

The Aim was to “Improve information on the status of *Hylobates lar carpenteri* in northwest Thailand and to identify at least one viable population and any necessary conservation interventions.”

Four main objectives were proposed:

1. Train WISE Foundation in the conduct of rapid gibbon field surveys and threats assessments.
2. Conduct at least three field surveys in areas previously identified as containing significant numbers of gibbons in villages in Chiang Mai province.
3. Identify one priority site and conduct participatory planning for conservation actions at the site.
4. Complete telephone survey in central Chiang Mai province, and expand it to Mae Hong Son and northern Tak provinces.

3. Implementation schedule

Implementation was originally planned for completion in May 2013. Most of the fieldwork was completed at this time, but the completion of telephone surveys and the peer review and revision of



Fig 3. Training in field survey techniques for village participants.

the technical report (see below) was significantly delayed due to the multiple responsibilities of the implementation team and project supervisor. The actual schedule as implemented is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Implementation schedule

Date	Activity
Before December 2012	Telephone survey
December 2012	Train surveyors from the three areas
December 2012	Coordinate Huibabah neighbourhood in Tambol Jaem Hluang, Ampeu Kalyawattana, Chiang Mai
26 January 2013	Hold a conference with leaders of conservation groups at Ampeu Chom Tong and leaders at the Khun Tae village
26 January, 2013	Meet and converse with villagers at Ban Hui Som Poi
29 January, 2013	Meet and converse for a second time with villagers at Ban Khun Tae
29 January – 2 February, 2013	Survey at Ban Hui Som Poi and Han Khun Tae
6 March, 2013	Prepare to meet with villagers of Ban Khun Win (part 1)
13 March, 2013	Meet with villagers of Ban Khun Win (part 2)
14 – 18 March, 2013	Conduct gibbon survey at Ban Khun Win
19 May, 2013	Follow up any remaining information at the field sites and conclude the survey
25-26 May, 2013	Follow up the remaining information at Ban Khun Tae
27-30 July, 2013	Final results discussions with three villages
June to December 2013	Telephone surveys with remaining villages; over 100 completed

4. Participants

The KESAN staff team comprised core staff from the Thailand office and local coordinators:

- Saw Blaw Htoo, Activity Leader. Karen Biodiversity Expert for 10 years
- Saw Wee Eh Htoo, Biodiversity Coordinator for 3 years
- Waiying Tongbue, Research Team Leader

4.1 Local participants

The project received a lot of help from a conservation organization in the Chom Tong area (HNCC) and the Ban Khun Win Watershed Network (BKWWN), both of which have members from the villages in the study area. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the participants who helped us with this research: Mr Withun Mahanopnatiprai, Mr Prachan Tanuratanachanchai, Mr Lek Maniratchayong, Mr Chaepaw Sawangratanachayong, Mr Supan Kiatasuwiyon, Mr Bee Praichiwin, Mr Sunan, Mr Sutat Tangjaijreunkul, Mr Tongin, Mr Leeleu Pongpanasawat, Mr La Manipinmon, Mr Thongsuk Praiwansiri, Mr Tipaw Chodo, Mr Duangkham, Mr Abeu Pasitong, Mr Watnasak Praisongsan, Mr Nopadon Tiangsong Kul, Mr Boonlert Narongsaksit, Mr Chataw Apiromtada and Mr Rirat Kirisiprai.

5. Results by objectives and activity

5.1 Train WISE Foundation in survey methods

Training for the field team was conducted by Saw Blaw Htoo, who had previously received training in gibbon survey techniques from PRCF and Prof. Warren Brockelman of the Chulalongkorn University in Thailand. Saw Blaw Htoo is ethnic Karen and had already lead gibbon surveys in Ker Short Ter forest of Karen State, Myanmar, under an earlier collaboration with PRCF also part funded by GCA.

Unfortunately for the survey, Blaw Htoo was not available to oversee the field surveys and the field researchers therefore did not receive the oversight in the field that was originally envisaged. This lead to some poor research, with problems in listening post selection, data training for local counterparts, data collection, data recording and data management (see below).

However Saw Blaw Htoo reports that the trainees were highly motivated and interested to learn this new skill, and to share their experiences with the target communities. As local Thai Karen themselves, they were also central to the larger project goal of building a conservation constituency for gibbons, which did not rest heavily on the quality of the field research.

5.2 Conduct at least three field surveys

Three survey sites were selected in Chiang Mai province based on results from initial telephone interviews conducted in 2012, and largely following the sites suggested in the original proposal. Two of these were close to neighbouring villages, Ban Huai Som Poi and Ban Khun Tae, where surveys were conducted simultaneously from 29 January to 2 February 2013. The other site, close to Ban Kun Wun village, was surveyed between 14 and 18 March 2013 due to staff and villager scheduling issues. The results of both surveys are documented in the separate technical report produced by the project team (Tongbue et al 2013).



Fig 4. Survey teams comprising WISE staff and local villagers during the surveys

5.3 Participatory planning at one site

This activity was not fully achieved. Discussions were held at each site before the surveys to engage communities in the project and to raise their awareness of the motivations of the Karen implementation team with respect to the precarious situation of the Northern White-handed Gibbon. Discussions were also held at the end of each survey to share the results and to identify ways the communities to attempt to protect the species.

The results of these discussion do not really represent “conservation action planning” as such, partly because of the lack of additional funds to back up a plan, and also because the long-term protection of these gibbon populations is only likely to be achieved through ongoing efforts from all stakeholders.

However, the fact that the populations persist in a human dominated landscape is encouraging, and may reflect the widely held Karen belief that they respect this species. And the project implementation team has spent over fifteen years working to support improved livelihoods and resource governance among the target communities and will continue to do so, meaning that village commitments to gibbon protection have a strong chance of ongoing support and reflection.

5.4 Telephone survey results

Although originally intended to take place prior to the field surveys, the schedule of the lead researcher did not allow for a concerted effort on the survey until after the fieldwork was completed. However, it was eventually possible to conduct 113 interviews covering 117 Thai-Karen villages located in or near forest in six northwestern provinces.

The difference between interviews and villages arises because several villages were lumped together due to their close proximity and the possibility of double counting gibbon groups. One additional village was actually in Petchuburi, which is not in the range of this *Hylobates lar* sub-species and the result was excluded from the analysis. However this village, close to Keang Krachan National Park, recorded by far the highest number of gibbon groups, at 50.

In terms of group numbers (Table 3), the 117 villages recorded between 1 and 10 groups, with the average being 1.9 groups per village. The geographical distribution of records is hard to say exactly as it was not possible to geo-reference villages, but they can be located by administrative boundaries. Taking the ten villages reporting over four groups, we can see that they are mostly in three districts of Chiang Mai province. From this we deduce that the area near Khun Mae Ruam and Huay Pa has the best gibbon numbers based on the interviews.

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Table 2. Number of villages involved in the telephone survey, by province

Province	Villages surveyed
Chiang Mai	64
Mae Hong Son	19
Tak	21
Kanchanaburi	5
Petburi	1
Kanpaeng Pet	3
Total	113

Table 3. Telephone survey results

Number of groups	Villages
1	60
2	26
3	21
4	5
5	3
6	1
10	1
Total	117

Table 3. Villages reporting over four groups (= 10)

Village	Tract	District	Province	Groups
Mae Ngan Luam	Ban Hin Phon	Mae Chaem	Chiang Mai	5
Huay Pa	Mae Na Chon	Mae Chaem	Chiang Mai	10
Khun Thet	Doi Kaew	Chon Thon	Chiang Mai	5
Huay Som Poi	Doi Kaew	Chon Thon	Chiang Mai	5
Khun Win	Mae Win	Mae Wang	Chiang Mai	4
Nong Muon/Mae Chit	Mae Na Chang	Ma La Noi	Mae Hong Son	6
Mae Krong	Mae Suk	Mae Chaem	Chiang Mai	4
Hoi Bon	Mae Suk	Mae Chaem	Chiang Mai	4
Pet Nit Yom	Sat Ngam	Krong Laan	Kampaeng Pet	4
Mae Yat Oo	Mae La Mao	Mae Rat Mat	Tak	4



Fig 5. Awareness raising and discussion of results involved broad cross-section of communities in the survey villages

The average group number may not be too encouraging in itself, but gibbons were recorded from every single village surveyed. Of course we cannot at this time confirm for the veracity of the interview estimates, but the former estimates for the three villages surveyed under this project proved to be largely accurate. Our findings thus tentatively suggest gibbons may remain widespread in the Thai Karen landscape of northwest Thailand (an underlying but untested assumption of the project), and that there could be in the region of 270 groups scattered among the 117 survey villages.

6. Outputs

- Final technical report including photos of the participants during the field surveys:
Thongbue, W., Saw Blaw Htoo and Grindley, M. (2013). Results of three surveys for Carpenter's Lar Gibbon Hylobates lar carpenteri in Chiang Mai Province, Thailand. WISE Foundation, KESAN and the People Resources and Conservation Foundation, Chiang Mai.
- Brief narrative project report, including images of selected activities and the results of planning for follow-up steps (this document).
- Awareness of gibbon conservation issues and training in basic field survey methods provided to 20 participants from three villages.
- Knowledge of distribution and status of *Hylobates lar carpenteri* extended in northern Thailand
- Additional species records (birds and mammals) gained for three survey sites
- Telephone surveys extended to 114 more villages

7. Financial report

A detailed breakdown of expenses and all receipts and supporting documentation was submitted to the PRCF for verification and is available on request. A summary of accounts is presented below.

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT					
PROJECT PERIOD (1st Dec 12 - 30st Dec 13)					
(In local currency TBH)					
No.	Income	Amount	No.	Expenditure	Amount
5-Nov-12	Received from GCA	134,635.29	A	Personnal Cost	44,950.00
			B	Logistics	36,156.00
			C	Materials	29,574.00
			D	Other Costs	23,955.00
					-
				Total	134,635.00
				Surplus income over expenditure	0.29
	Total Amount	134,635.29		Total Amount	134,635.29

8. Follow-up actions

Based on the survey results and consultations, WISE Foundation has identified several priority actions related to conservation of gibbons and nature. The following activities will be launched with the three field survey villages, building on the sensitisation that has been achieved through this project, with a view to expanding into other WISE target villages in future.

1. How to improve the year round distribution of gibbon food? Working with local communities and students, there will be a research activity to understand the phenology of gibbon food species.
2. Based on the above, habitat enrichment will be undertaken through gap planting in forest close to villages, probably including *ficus* species and other trees identified through participatory research; there will also be a focus on protecting sleeping trees. There is a strong possibility to cooperate with the Forest Restoration and Research Unit of Chiang Mai University Department of Biology, which has extensive experience of habitat restoration
3. Culture and traditional values with respect to nature and gibbons is fading, so there will be an activity to document and disseminate traditional knowledge from elders and senior villagers, through both documentation (a book will be produced) and presentations to school classes
4. A small project will bring students into nature and help rebuild the traditional closeness between Karen and nature; three schools (two primary, one high school) will participate, from where students will take short field trips into the forest and on returning to class will do small art projects to document what they saw, smelled, heard etc.
5. HNCC, the WISE member from the Ban Huoi Som Poi and Ban Khun Tae survey villages, will continue to monitor the gibbon groups identified in their area and report back to the WISE Foundation network.

9. Conclusion

Despite delays due to a number of factors outside the control of the project implementers, it was possible to conduct the surveys and other activities largely as planned. The gibbon populations in this part of Thailand are not large, primarily due to habitat degradation and fragmentation, but there is growing evidence that gibbons are not persecuted directly and remain widespread in this landscape. The next challenge is to address the land use and planning issues that will otherwise lead to further fragmentation, and also to consider the need and feasibility of forest regeneration and restoration in corridors between groups. If not, this species that is highly valued and respected by the Karen people will face the same fate as Hoolock gibbons *Hoolock leuconedys* in eastern India, where single groups that cling to isolated forest pockets or even individual trees are being physically relocated to ensure the survival of the species. Fortunately, WISE Foundation and its members are very keen to engage in gibbon conservation and are taking steps to act now before it is too late.

Appendix 1: Questionnaire for rapid survey of Thai Karen villages

Completed by _____ Date _____ Contact number _____

Name of village _____

Location (province, district, commune) _____

Lat / long _____

Village leader name _____

Contact name and phone number _____

Number of years village in current location (approx) _____

Are there gibbons present in or near the village? (**NONE / FEW / MANY**)

How many groups? _____

How far away (in km)? _____ Name of gibbon area(s): _____

Do people from the village sometimes hunt gibbons? (**NEVER / SOMETIMES/ OFTEN**)

Do people from outside sometimes hunt gibbons? (**NEVER / SOMETIMES/ OFTEN**)

How is the gibbon population compared to 5 years ago?

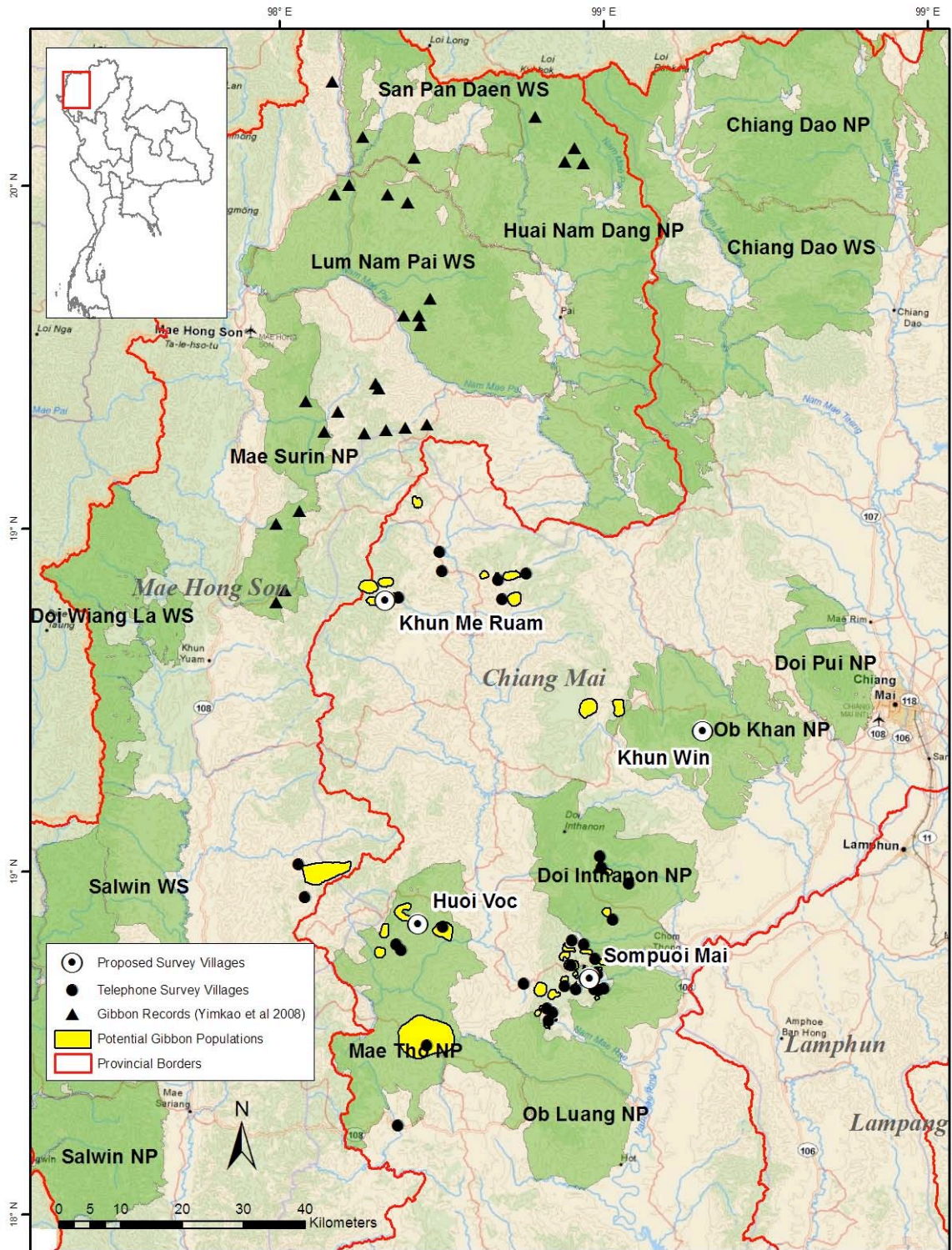
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Much higher	higher	Same	lower	Much Lower
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What are the main threats to gibbons near the village?

Hunting by the village	<input type="checkbox"/>	Conversion of forest to agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hunting by outsiders	<input type="checkbox"/>	Development (industry, roads etc)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Logging for local use	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (specify):	<input type="checkbox"/>
Logging for outside use	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Appendix 2: Mapping of possible Lar Gibbon locations in northwest Thailand



Source: Project Data. Prepared by Mark Grindley/PRCF.