

By Marina Kenyon

On Dao Tien we have 29 golden-cheeked gibbons (*Nomascus gabriellae*), 9 pygmy slow loris (*Nycticebus pygmaeus*) and 4 black-shanked douc monkeys (*Pygathrix nigripes*) that are in different phases of their rehabilitation or have been released back to the wild.

Phase 1 - Initial Quarantine and Socialization in Cages

Most of our primates are either too young, too thin (especially the gibbons through malnutrition in the pet trade), or too fat (captive loris' can pile on the weight) to move on to the next stage of their rehabilitation.

We have 23 gibbons rescued from the illegal trade in Southern Vietnam, that came from tourist stops, the pet trade, and others that were just heading to market. Our most recent rescue was in Bien Hoa City. Uh (meaning 'thin') and Teo (meaning 'not so thin') had been kept as pets since they were infants. The two gibbons, now aged 8 and 6, were volunteered by their owners to return to the forest after hearing about our work on Dao Tien. The male, Teo, had suffered severe rickets in his time in captivity giving him the appearance of a hunchback. The two are now adjusting to the sounds and sights of the forest on Dao Tien and it will be interesting to see how the male, with his hunchback, gets on in the trees.



Teo gets a health check by Uli Stricher and Lee Butler

Phase 2 - Training in Trees in a Semi-forested Enclosure



Ellie and the nursery mob

The next step is to graduate our rescued primates into semi-free forested areas, for them to practice travelling through the trees, finding food, and keeping up off the ground. We have 6 gibbons and 1 small loris in phase 2. Merry and Lee Lee our first pair of gibbons in the 20ha semi-wild forest are on track for release next wet season. Both have had no problems with their radio collars. In the smaller nursery enclosure we have three youngsters Limhuyen, Mису and Trang, being supervised by Ellie, a young female preparing for final release.

The remaining individual in a semi-free forested area is Hai, a female pygmy loris. Hai is six years old and was released in to the forest in February. After one month of monitoring her by radio tracking we found she was moving only 1m per day. It was the peak of the dry season, and although Hai was next to the river and a pool of water, she was not coping. We recaptured Hai and took her back to the centre where we found that she had lost weight and was suffering from dehydration. Hai bounced back but it was clear that more work was needed to document and formalize a plan for loris rehabilitation and release. It was not good enough to take loris from a cage and put them straight back into the forest – the usual form throughout Vietnam and Asia. We decided to build a small semi-free enclosure for loris so we could monitor their behaviour and know that each individual had the skills to select good sleeping sites, stay out of direct sun, and hunt enough insects to feed themselves before they are released back into the wild.

Phase 3 - Return to the Wild

To date we have released 8 pygmy slow loris and 4 black-shanked douc monkeys back to the wild. The doucs are fast tracked for release, assuming they are healthy, as they are sensitive leaf-eaters that generally do not thrive in captivity. The four doucs are regularly seen on the island and now Thanh, a small male when first released, has gained weight and considerable size. Whenever the Vietnamese Primate Care Staff, see him they are impressed by his condition and increasing size.

EAST's work in the community is also expanding with our Education and Awareness Program. We are currently building a small educational area on Dao Tien, providing school groups an area to sit down and learn more about our work, out of the sun or rain. We hope to finish this job before the start of the dry season (December) and the peak season for our awareness work.

To learn more about our work and support the conservation of endangered primate species of Southern Vietnam please see our website at www.go-east.org and where we have a wonderful gift shop with bespoke Vietnamese primate goods.



Pygmy loris, Hai, in her semi-free forested area