

DAO TIEN UPDATE

By Dr Marina Kenyon

MORE PYGMY SLOW LORIS RELEASES

Following the successful release of the two pygmy loris, Mistletoe and Thang, during the wet season, we have now released 6 more loris in the dry season. The aim is to successfully release loris back to the wild and identify and document the best habitat conditions, time of year, and criteria for identifying individuals that are suitable for release. With the wild population dwindling (fewer than 700 pygmy loris remain in the forests of Vietnam) it is critical that guidelines are developed for such rehabilitation and release projects.



Vo Thanh Binh releasing Toby

On Dao Tien itself we have released three more - male Tuyet and two females Hai and Phuong. Into Cat Tien National Park three adults, female Simone, adult male Nhan and sub-adult male Toby, have been released. All loris were radio collared so we are able to monitor their movements for up to six months before the collars drop off. Already the trio are behaving differently compared to the loris that were released during the wet season. They have not gone far from the release site and they returned to the cage during their first few days of freedom.



Toby after his release

GIBBON REHABILITATION - BRANCHING OUT INTO THE TREES

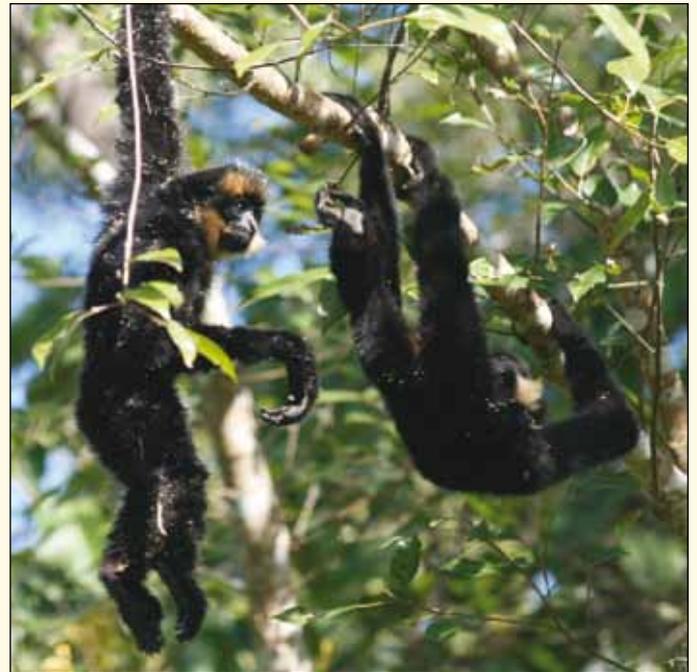


Ellie is now in the final stages of her rehabilitation program

Our nursery group of gibbons, Misu, Limhuyen and Trang, along with two older gibbons, Ellie and Dao, have been moved to a new forested enclosure on Dao Tien. This will give the youngsters, that are still too small for re-introduction back into the wild, a very natural environment in which to grow up.

When we first released the three small ones, Misu ran out and straight into the trees while Trang and Limhuyen took things much slower – two full weeks slower until they came out of the rehabilitation cage into the forest. The three youngsters are doing very well now although sometimes they seem far too brave for their own good, making giant leaps from branch to branch that are terrifying.

Ellie and Dao will join the nursery mob in the trees and hopefully serve as role models and dispute referees. Their time in the forested enclosure will show us if they are ready for release in the coming year.



Limhuyen & Trang in the semi-forested area



SEMI-WILD FORESTED HABITAT

At nearly 20 ha this is a very large training area for a single pair of gibbons - an average wild home range would be 40 ha. The purpose of this area is for the gibbons to regain a totally arboreal life, forage for their own food, and most importantly learn to ignore humans. The southern section of Dao Tien has been isolated with a 750m fence (thanks to Jeremy's brilliant electric fence work) from one edge of the island to the other. The only problem is that between wet and dry season the Dong Nai River changes in height of 4-5m, from a slow stream to a raging torrent and the fence has to cope with both extremes.

Gibbons Merry and Lee Lee have now passed two sets of health checks and have been chosen as our first candidates for a semi-wild release. They will be radio collared so we can monitor their use of the area, behaviour, and how they cope with the radio collars. If the gibbons pass their semi-wild test the count down is on for full release in November 2010!



Merry



Jeremy at the electric fence

EDUCATION AWARENESS

Working concurrently with primate rehabilitation is education awareness in the local community, and beyond. Before Lee Lee and Merry move into the semi-free we will have a local community meeting, educating people on the laws of Vietnam for hunting, trade in endangered primates and an update on our work on Dao Tien. With support from Alison Cronin and Kurtis Pei this will take place in March, just before Merry and Lee Lee move into the semi-wild. Local support is vital and when asked how we can help local communities, the first response was help with English for their children: this is something we can do!

Our Education Program in Vietnam for the New Year was launched with a "Super primate" activity in the ABC International School in Ho Chi Minh City. Children designed a "super primate" that can survive all the present threats to wild primates; habitat change and hunters. This was a great success with wonderful designs, ugly primates you would not want as a pet and ones with special powers to protect their babies from being taken from them. An education program running in Vietnam and the UK is now in final preparation ready to start the next academic year.



Stephanie Pace, Volunteer Education Officer, with school children



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