

CONSERVATION STATUS OF GIBBONS IN LAO PDR

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Lao PDR has a high diversity of gibbons, second only to Indonesia. Six species were confirmed to persist in Lao PDR during the 1990s; the Western Black Crested Gibbon *Nomascus concolor*; Northern White-cheeked Crested Gibbon *N. leucogenys*; Southern White-cheeked Crested Gibbon *N. siki*; a form of uncertain identity but morphologically close to Yellow-cheeked Crested Gibbon *N. gabriellae*; White-handed Gibbon *Hylobates lar* and Pileated Gibbon *H. pileatus*. The first two are globally Red Listed as Critically Endangered and the other four are Endangered. Of these five were confirmed in the 2000s, but we found no evidence of survey activity during this decade within the Pileated Gibbon's range. Lao PDR evidently supports most of the world's *N. leucogenys* and *N. siki*; it may also do so for *N. concolor* making it a crucial location for global conservation of this genus. Threats to Lao gibbons mainly come from the widespread illegal hunting and habitat loss, which threaten many of the large mammals and other wildlife of Lao PDR. Gibbons are rarely targeted for hunting and when taken it is often opportunistic, except in a few cases to supply the demand in Vietnam for primate bones. On-going heavy forest conversion and fragmentation is a ubiquitous threat to national biodiversity. Global priorities for conservation in Lao PDR include securing key populations of *N. concolor* and *N. leucogenys* at representative locations, resolving taxonomic and distribution uncertainties between the pale-cheeked crested gibbons and clarification of the threat posed by hunting.

Keywords: gibbons, Lao PDR, *Nomascus*, conservation