

SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR OF THE WESTERN HOOLOCK GIBBON IN A LOWLAND RAINFOREST FRAGMENT OF THE UPPER BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY, NORTHEASTERN INDIA

S. Sankaran^{1,2}, G.S. Rawat¹, R. S. Kumar^{1,3}, A. Sinha^{2,3}

¹*Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, India*, ²*National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, India*, ³*Nature Conservation Foundation, Mysore, India*

Presenter's Email: s.sumithra@gmail.com

The western hoolock gibbon *Hoolock hoolock*, a typical pair-living ape, is apparently the closest living relative of the ancestor of all extant gibbons, which is believed to have been monogamous. Yet little is known about the nature of social relationships in hoolock gibbon societies. This preliminary, observational study aimed to understand the nature of monogamy in this species by examining the social behaviour of the paired adult individuals in three habituated groups of different size. Our data, collected using instantaneous scans and focal animal sampling over a period of c.300 h, reveal complex, but variable, affiliative interactions between the adult pairs. Social interactions constituted 10-11% of the daily group activities. The proportion of observed time spent allogrooming – 10%, 48% and 64% for the three different groups – increased with group size. Aggression was rare within the groups, with only three instances being recorded during the study. Extensive play and other affiliative interactions between non-adult group members and adult males indicated certain levels of male parental care. Adult females, however, never displayed play behaviour. They were also not the primary leaders during ranging and were responsible for only 19 to 46% of the 123 to 130 ranging sequences displayed by the three groups. Adult females, however, invariably initiated and terminated duetting, one of the most important social interactions displayed. Hoolock gibbon society thus appears to be a near-equitable one in which the absence of sex-biased dominance facilitates variable social roles for the two paired adults.

Keywords: Monogamy, duetting, leadership, social interactions