

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

SCHEDULE-II SPECIES ENJOYS A SEMI-WILD INHABITATION

The Editor,
Indian Forester

It was a memorable day for me and my friend who went to Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary, Jorhat in wildlife observation week despite of the fact that we had witnessed a dead response to wildlife week celebration. We were warmly received by the Forest Guard and given a brief account on the Gibbon wildlife sanctuary. It was a pleasure to know that the 20.98 km² sanctuary has a rich diversity of primates, butterflies, mammals and even reptiles.

The Gibbon wildlife sanctuary, situated in Jorhat district of Upper Assam has its early history as 'Hollongapar' forest, which was declared as reserve forest in 1881. The government of Assam has notified it as wildlife sanctuary on 30th July 1997. The sanctuary lies between 26°40'-26°45' north and 94°20'-94°25' east. We were told that the area enjoys the movement of around 40 elephants, 26 families (comprising 1 to 5 members) of Hoolock gibbons (*Hoolock hoolock*; endangered IUCN 2013) around 4 troops (around 35 members) of Pig tailed macaques (*Macaca nemestrina*) and almost 100 individuals of stump tailed macaques (*Macaca arctoides*). It is recognised as one of the most diverse spot for primates in India. It holds mammals such as leopard, leopard cat, Chinese pangolin (*Manis pentadactyla*; endangered IUCN 2013) etc.

We were fortunate enough to spot capped langur (*Trachypithecus pileatus*), rhesus macaque (*Macaca mulatta*) and pig tailed macaque (*Macaca nemestrina*) in the sanctuary. A record of few butterflies like dark archduke (*Lexias dirtea*)? , ? ; common birdwing (*Troides helena*), commander (*Modura procris*) etc and some plant species was taken from the trials. *Ahaetulla prasina*, short-nosed vine snake (Least Concern, IUCN, 2013) was also recorded.

The most strange and an unforgettable sight we came across was, a Malayan giant squirrel (*Ratufa bicolor* gigantea) (Sparrman, 1778), which has a protection status: Schedule II (WPA, 1972), Appendix II (CITES) and Near threatened (IUCN, 2013), foraging near the human settlements. The Malayan giant squirrel is largely arboreal, a strict inhabitant of forests of North east in India (Gurung, K.K. and Raj Singh, 1996). The *R. bicolor* was sighted resting on a tall tree near the range office in the afternoon. It seemed that it was ignoring our presence even in 15m distance. It then climbed down and observed licking stone on the floor of an abandoned house. It was obvious from the behaviour of the squirrel that, it is quite familiar with human presence and sources of food in the settlement.

According to the guard, this squirrel is seen almost regularly in the forest edges and nearby areas of the houses. This could be because of seasonal food deficiency in the forests or some other reasons. The situation may put the species in danger of poaching or changes in behaviour. This is a serious issue which has to be addressed immediately at management level, since the species in focus is strictly protected under WPA, 1972.



Jis Sebastian
Rain Forest Research Institute, Jorhat, Assam