

โครงการคืนชะนีสู่ป่า Gibbon Rehabilitation Project



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Welcome to December GRP's newsletter.

December has been a month of highs and lows at GRP as we made our final preparations and finally release Mee and Payu into Khao Phra Thaew forest.

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Gibbon Rehabilitation Project (Phuket): GRP

Getting ready for the release



Over the years GRP has worked with the local community around Khao Phra Thaew non-hunting area to raise awareness about the consequences of illegal poaching and the importance of conservation. In the run up to the release our local staff made several trips to distribute information around the wider community to help reinforce our anti-poaching message.

In the final weeks before the release we also began to stock our forest camp with supplies. After each release we stay with the gibbons from dusk until dawn everyday for at least a two week

period to monitor their progress. In the early days of the project staff and volunteers would set off from the office at 5am in order to be with the gibbons before sunrise, but now we have a permanent shelter in the forest where we can spend the night, and enjoy the luxury of a lie in until 5.45am. Although working in the forest is always a challenge, camping in the peace and quiet of the jungle is a welcome break for all of us and a great chance for volunteers to learn some real jungle survival skills.

มูลนิธิช่วยชีวิตสัตว์ป่าแห่งประเทศไทย

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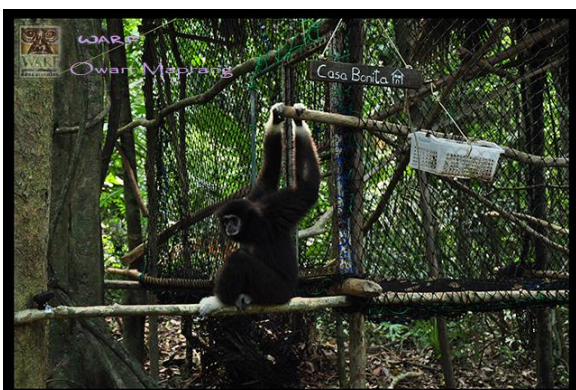
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The release of Mee and Payu

On Monday the 15th of December Mee and Payu were finally released into Khao Phra Thaew non-hunting area, Phuket. The release went well and both gibbons were quick to leave the cage and start exploring their new surroundings. Mee was the first to venture outside and quickly began to climb in the trees surrounding their cage, albeit very cautiously. As this is the first time Mee has been free in the forest since she was a tiny baby, it will take her sometime to learn how to move around the trees with confidence. Payu on the other hand took a little longer to leave the enclosure, but once outside he immediately moved with ease through the trees and made his way to their new feeding basket high above them. Payu already has many years of experience living in the forest so we expect he will quickly adapt to living in the wild again, and hopefully his confidence will help encourage Mee to explore.



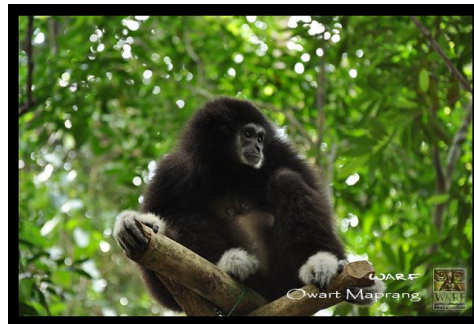
Along with the many challenges of adapting to a new environment, gibbon groups we release into KPT forest also have to contend with other gibbon families who can be less than welcoming to their new neighbours. From the very first day they were released, Mee and Payu began to receive visits from Jorn, Namthip and Sherpa. Namthip, who is actually Payu's sister, has generally stayed at a distance and not shown too much aggression. Her partner Jorn however, has made several attempts to attack Mee, and on one occasion knocked her out of the tree. Although Mee and Payu must eventually learn to defend themselves, to begin with it is very difficult for them as they are not as strong or fast as the other gibbons in the forest. This is one of the reasons why it is important to use a soft release method for gibbons, and stay with them round the clock for the first few weeks of their release. Although it is impossible to protect them entirely, the presence of our experienced staff goes a long way to deter the other gibbons from attacking and helps to give our new release groups the upper hand in these inevitable confrontations.

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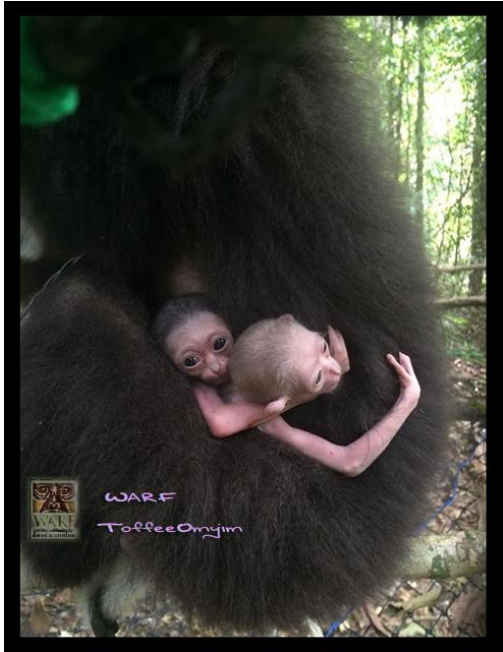
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An unexpected delivery

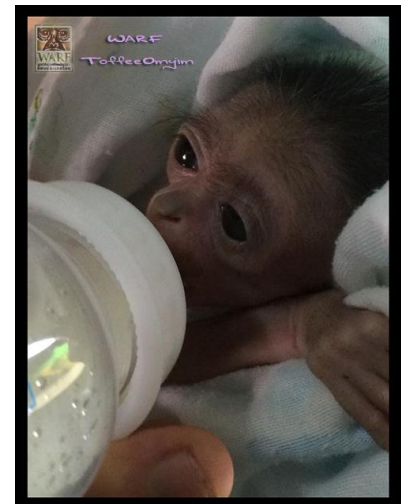


On Friday 26th December things took a drastic turn when Mee unexpectedly gave birth to twins, one male and one female. Although we knew Mee was pregnant, we believed she was due in early January and could never have predicted she was carrying twins. It is exceptionally rare to see gibbon twins and this was the first time we have encountered it at GRP. Sadly, gibbons typically give birth to one baby for a very good reason; they're simply not built to carry or care for more than one infant at a time.

As a first time mother Mee's instinct to carry the babies was very strong, but her lack of experience was clear from the start. Unsure how to get her little ones into the right position on her body, the challenge was made so much harder by the presence of two babies instead of one. Despite her best efforts to carry them around, the male twin eventually fell from high in the trees. Fortunately he landed on the soft, springy top of the training cage underneath and Mee quickly came down to pick him up again. However, she eventually became completely overwhelmed and exhausted, and

finally abandoned both babies on the roof of the cage.

Our staff acted immediately to retrieve the tiny infants and they were brought from the forest to the GRP main office where a make-shift ICU unit was put together. Despite their traumatic first day, both babies survived the night and we were optimistic that over the coming days we may be able to reunite them with Mee within the safety of the training cage. The



female twin, who was larger and stronger than her brother, was taken back the very next day and we were pleased to see Mee immediately come to retrieve her baby. The next day the male twin was also returned and we watched with bated breath to see how Mee would cope. At first Mee seemed a little overwhelmed, but in the afternoon of the second day she settled for the night with both babies settled in the right position and all seemed well. We were therefore shocked the next morning to discover that the male twin had fallen from Mee during the night and died.

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The female was also cold and lifeless, and was once again taken into our care.

After several more days receiving round the clock care from staff and volunteers the female twin made a good recovery and was growing stronger by the day. We finally decided to try to reunite mother and baby one more time, but after another promising start Mee once again proved incapable of caring for her daughter and finally the difficult decision was made to separate them permanently. For the last time the female twin was brought to our office for round the clock care, but sadly her little body had been pushed to its limit and a few days later she succumbed to a suspected infection, and passed away.

Moving forward

It's safe to say December has been one of the most challenging months in recent GRP history, both physically and psychologically. We were incredibly grateful to have received lots of advice and support from fellow gibbon carers and conservation projects around the world, not to mention hundreds of encouraging messages from our supporters. Despite the tragedy of losing both babies, we are still focussed on the positives, and look forward to once again releasing Mee and Payu into the forest where we hope they will establish a new territory where they can have another go at successfully start a family together.



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