

โครงการคืนชะนีสู่ป่า Gibbon Rehabilitation Project



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March 2014 (Volume 13 Issue 3)

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Once reintroduced into the wild, our gibbons' lives can take many unexpected turns. Successfully reintroduced in 2007 and the father of two wild-born baby gibbons, Payu, has been left single by a cruel twist of fate and we are now attempting to help him by introducing him to one of our captive females, Mee.



Payu (left) - Mee (right)

Welcome to the March issue of GRP's Newsletter

The Gibbon Rehabilitation Project is the longest running gibbon reintroduction project in the world, but early reintroduction attempts in the 1990's were not successful. Since 2002, however, GRP's work has been groundbreaking, with the conducting of soft release reintroductions of breeding families of white-handed gibbons (*Hylobates lar*) into the Khao Phra Thaeu forest on Phuket. This forest was chosen since it is the largest remaining evergreen rainforest on the mainland of Phuket covering an area of 2,228 ha. This is large enough to sustain 40-60 gibbon territories, if accounting for average white-handed gibbon territory sizes of 24-30 ha. The white-handed gibbon is native to Phuket, but the species was poached to extinction here between the 70's and early 80's.

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Gibbons are part of a healthy rainforest ecosystem and are believed to fill an important role as seed dispersers when they consume fruit and spread the seeds of many rainforest trees.

Before the release of a gibbon family GRP will select a territory and do preparations by cutting a trail network of 50m x 50m squares at set coordinates. This trail network is essential in order to allow post release monitoring. The gibbons are reintroduced through a soft release method which allows them to gradually gain independence from humans whilst still being monitored and fed by the project. Each reintroduction takes around 2 years to complete, from release preparations to the actual independence of the animals.

2014 marks the 12th year since the first family was released in the KPT forest and naturally many things have happened in these gibbons lives in that time! As adults grow old and babies grow up, the forest drama at our reintroduction site is practically a soap-opera! In this newsletter you can read about the disintegration of Dao's family and about Payu's search for a new mate - and his subsequent return to our Rehabilitation site. This is just one of the unexpected events that take place in a reintroduced gibbon population.

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In depth: MEE & JOJO



Mee and Jojo have been a couple for so long that it's been easy to forget their individual pasts. Although the two of them are very close and obviously harbour friendly feelings for each other, we could not convince Jojo to commit any further in the relationship even by giving the couple the privacy of our most isolated cage at the Rehabilitation Site over a year ago (in autumn 2012). For a few years there has been talk of splitting the couple up in order to be able to offer Mee a more realistic chance of having babies and being returned to the wild, but splitting a loving duo is always a tricky decision and the inevitable was postponed time and again in the hope of a miracle that would put a sparkle into their relationship. This March, with the return of Payu from the forest, the longtime coming chance for Mee to have a real family may just have arrived! Mee and Jojo have been separated and Mee is now housed next to the handsome wild stranger; Payu.

Mee arrived at the GRP in September 2002, together with the similar aged gibbon called "O". The two of them had been used as pets to attract customers into a Bangkok restaurant, before being confiscated by authorities. Although of similar backgrounds Mee and O could hardly have been more different; where Mee was independent and confident, O was shy and introvert. These differences of personalities are still apparent today. In 2003, after passing their quarantine, Mee and O joined the largest juvenile group at our Rehabilitation site, consisting also of Jojo, Santi, Jep, Jonus and Max. It was a wild time!

Soon, it became apparent that two of the juveniles, O and Jep, were not developing at the pace of the rest of the group, and they were moved out. Feeding times in the large group could be tricky as Max and Jojo were very dominant, but Mee managed to stand her ground. By 2005 she had struck up a strong friendship and alliance with the bigger Jojo. Perhaps mistakenly judged as a sign of pair-bonding, the friendship of Mee and Jojo was nevertheless strong enough to become a nuisance for the other gibbons in the group, and in 2006 the two of them were moved into their own quarters. Ever since then Mee and

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Jojo have shared a cage and enjoyed playing and grooming together. There was just always something missing...

Keep up-to-date with how the socialisation of Mee and Payu goes and on how Jojo is coping with his new single life on GRP's official Facebook page!

Payu's Story:



Payu was the first offspring of Nuan and Khao, born on the 14th of July 2001 at GRP's Rehabilitation Site. Nuan was a doting mother who actually spoiled her first born by nursing him into his 4th year of life. It was therefore not until 2006 that Payu's younger sister Namthip was born. The family was released into the wild in 2007, when Namthip was one year old. The reintroduction was successful and for over a year everything was looking very good. Then suddenly one day Khao was gone. We

will never know exactly what happened to him. Payu's mum Nuan had lost her partner of 12 years and she had little chance of defending her position as the territorial owner when confronted by the much faster and younger, wild, female Dao, who took the chance to "hit" on the now nearly 8-year old Payu. Nuan lost the fight and was injured and returned to our Rehabilitation Site, whereas Payu and Dao became a breeding pair. Their first wild-born offspring, Newbe-Mek, was born in December 2009. In 2012 the couple's second wild-born offspring, named Saifa, was born and since Payu's sister Namthip was still living with the family they were now the largest group at our Reintroduction Site.

Sadly, tragedy struck sometime in mid-2013, when Dao and Saifa disappeared. They could have had an accident, a fall, an attack by a python, been injured in a fight with another gibbon group – or they could have been poached. We will never know. In October 2013 the skull of a gibbon was found in Dao's territory and we could not but draw the conclusion that mother and baby were gone for good. For a few months afterwards, Payu was still sighted in the territory together with his sister and now 4-year old son

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Newbie-Mek, but in February 2014 a lone Payu turns up at our Rehabilitation Site, drawn here by the singing of our caged female gibbons. We hope to make a quick introduction of Payu and Mee and if they hit a cord, we will bring them into the forest and release them – knowing that Payu has the necessary experience to be able to look after Mee in the wild.

Gibbon updates:

Brittany and Muki: Who would have thought it? Brittany looks no more than a juvenile, being 6 years this year but small for her age. However, when 10 year old Muki was moved next-door in an attempt to introduce him to the juvenile group consisting of Brittany, Pee Mai and Brittany's childhood friend Tunda – it seemed to be almost love at first sight! Muki has already got one failed reintroduction behind him and is not considered a prime-candidate for release whereas Brittany has many things going for her, so we have to consider whether this budding relationship really is the best future option for the young female. However, at GRP we rarely give up on our gibbons and everyone would be happy to give Muki a second chance to return to the wild, if we saw that there was potential for success....

Jane & Khun Saul: In order to make room for a Mee - Payu introduction, the chance for Jane & Khun Saul to move higher up the slope at our Rehabilitation Site emerged. For those who do not know, Jane and Khun Saul were introduced on an off-chance in September last year (just 6 months ago) and to everyone's surprise hit it off straight away! This young, but very well bonded couple, were this March moved into Mee & Jojo's old cage at the very top of our Rehabilitation Site. Since Khun Saul can be a bit of a stress-head around people, we hope that the isolated location will aid him in giving 100% of his attention to his lovely young bride!

Bo: A while back the cage right next to Bo was taken down and now the area has been cleared and measured up in preparation for the build of the first of the new front-row enclosures. Bo is watching all the ongoing work with mild interest and luckily has shown no tendency of getting upset or stressed by it. At the end of the year we are also hoping to have Bo's and Tam's new cages ready.

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Forest News:

Cop's family: Cop, Jorn and their son Sherpa continue to do very well in the wild, since supplemental foods were stopped 3 months ago. This month the family was observed foraging, resting and singing together – in a perfectly close-knit family unit. We are so happy that this group, released in 2012, has made such an incredibly easy-looking adjustment to the wild!

March Volunteer Profile:

Name: Richard Billington **Nationality:** British / English
Education/Profession: 30 year Fire and Rescue Service career, now retired. **Age:** 60 years **Length of Volunteering with the GRP:** Three and a half years

Describe your favorite day of work at the GRP: The working days I like the most are spent at the Rehabilitation site feeding the



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gibbons, or looking for released gibbon families in the rainforest. Being around the gibbons is a pleasure, their behaviour and interaction with each other can be very entertaining. It is hard work, made harder by the 30+ degree temperature but very rewarding.

Describe the funniest moment from you time volunteering with the GRP? There have been many funny moments. One day while I was cleaning Bobbie and Songkran's cage I noticed a snake coiled around the wire. It was a pit viper, which is a dangerous species so I called down to "Mak and Ong" who were working near me that day, I thought they would know exactly what to do. When they saw the snake at first they yelled and started to run away, then they hid behind my back, looking over my shoulder and telling me to use the water hose, which I had already done. We shook the wire, used sticks, even shouted at it but it didn't want to move. Eventually the snake moved away and into the forest. I'll never forget the look on Mak and Ong's faces, and their reaction when they first saw the snake, it really was funny, though they insisted later that they were only pretending to be scared.

Describe one of the gibbon/langur characters that you feel you have gotten to know a little bit during your time here: Cop, Jorn and Sherpa are a family of gibbons that will always be special to me. Sherpa was born just a few days after I first arrived at GRP. I saw him on the first day of his life and I have seen him develop into a strong, independent and confident young gibbon. Cop and Jorn are good parents too. The family were released in November 2012 and I have sometimes been up alone to feed and observe them. They adapted very well to living in the wild, and to see them travel through the trees 30 or more metres high, with Sherpa leading the way sometimes leaping across gaps of 5 metres from tree to tree is quite spectacular. Sometimes Sherpa hitches a ride on the feeding basket as the food is hoisted high into the trees. When I see this and think what they have been through to finally be free I know GRP is doing a great job.

