

โครงการคืนชะนีสู่ป่า Gibbon Rehabilitation Project



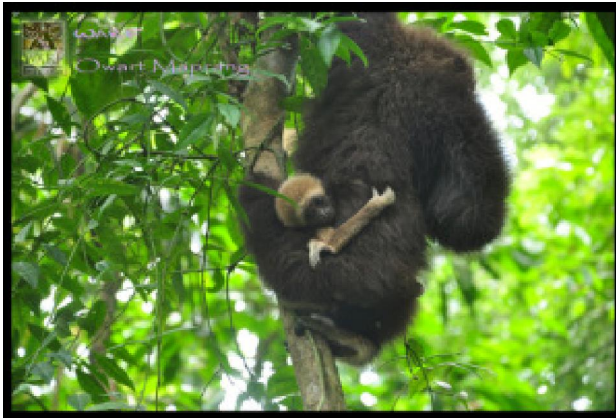
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April 2014 (Volume 13 Issue 4)

A new baby is born at our Reintroduction Site!

This month we finally have some good news from the forest after being hit by several tragedies over the past year. Lek (reintroduced in 2003) has got a brand new baby! Baby "KAI" is the 12th baby gibbon born wild at our Reintroduction Site to date.



Kai, the baby (left) – Lek's family (right)

Welcome to the April issue of GRP's Newsletter

April has been an incredibly busy month at the GRP. Two new gibbons (Willy and Brany) have arrived and since they were confirmed disease free before we accepted them, they have been able to move straight up to our Rehabilitation Site. Later in the month Nat from the forest, turned up at our Rehabilitation Site, attracted here by his old flame Nuan – he has now been temporarily captured before re-release. Observations of gibbon socializations and pair bonding have this month – amongst other things – assured us that Payu (who lived in the forest for 7 years but was widowed in 2013) and Mee are showing all the hoped for signs of pair-bonding and plans can go ahead to prepare for their release later again. Our Rehabilitation Site is now full to overflow despite that our lovely Bobbie and Songkran have left us to join the new Reintroduction Program in Chiang Mai (GRPC). You can read Songkran's story below.

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We have also been able to get on with a lot of different jobs this month thanks to the many volunteers that have joined us at this time. In addition to all the ongoing cage-building at our Rehabilitation Site, many a day has been spent in the forest, checking up on all the released families and it was during such a day that we discovered that Lek had given birth again! After all the recent hardships at our Reintroduction Site, it is great for us to have the confirmation once again that our gibbons are not just surviving, but thriving and breeding!

This month we would also like to express a special thanks to the Centara Grand Beach Resort in Phuket for their donation towards our work!

*Contributing writer: James Rowen, Newsletter main writer and editor: Petra Osterberg
Head editor: Owart Maprang*

In depth: **SONGKRAN**

Bobbie and Songkran have left the GRP to start a new life in Chiang Mai. Together with Bambam, Santi and baby Peepo they will be the first gibbons released in the newly started reintroduction project there. Releasing gibbons as couples has not been part of GRP's successful reintroduction concept, since such attempts conducted in the project's early history (between 1992 and 2000) repeatedly failed. But maybe time is ripe to try this again? Our head-organization certainly believes so. We are hoping that the bond between Bobbie and Songkran is strong enough to keep them together throughout the initial release-stress and that they soon will be able to enjoy life in freedom.

Ten years ago, in spring 2004, GRP experienced one of its most intensive times in gibbon rescues. Over just a couple of months' time, 11 new gibbons, 10 of them infants or juveniles, were confiscated by authorities or surrendered by owners, and brought to the project. Songkran was the youngest of these gibbons at less than 6 months old. He was brought in by the authorities on the 13th of April 2004, on Songkran day (Thai New Year), together with the slightly older Khun Saul who also had been confiscated from the same owners. Both gibbons had been exploited as tourist photo props in Patong beach.

มูลนิธิช่วยชีวิตสัตว์ป่าแห่งประเทศไทย

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At the tender age of 6 months gibbons are not much more developed than human babies of the same age and are fully dependent on their mothers to carry them, nurse them, comfort them and keep them warm. Songkran was in need of around-the clock care. Fortunately for him, GRP shortly received 3 other baby gibbons less than a year-old and all four babies could soon benefit from each other's company. In this way, the babies were less likely to imprint too heavily on their human carers. Sure enough, Songkran never acquired a strong attachment for people and actually grew up relatively weary of us – instead he came to rely on his best friend Bambam, for comfort. But there is still today evidence of Songkran's traumatic childhood and the loss of his mother; like many primates deprived of maternal care in infancy, Songkran sucks his thumb.



At the GRP Songkran grew up socially in juvenile playgroups. He was a harmless playmate, not at all dominant or aggressive. He managed to make many friends, but it was Bambam who remained his closest companion up until adolescence. In 2011, when Bambam was returned to GRP's Quarantine Site for closer monitoring of a potentially spreading eye cataract, Songkran was introduced to the few year younger female Bobbie. The two got along very well and although Songkran was fully mature he was not too pushy. When Bobbie reached maturity, it was evident that a pair-bond had started to take form between them. We have not been expecting any offspring just yet, since Bobbie only turns 8-years this year, but a family is certainly something that we can see on the horizon for these two in the coming years. We would have loved to follow their path to freedom here in Phuket, but can only wish them the very best of luck now in their new home in Chiang Mai.

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April Volunteer Profile:

1. **Name:** James Rowen
2. **Nationality:** British
3. **Education/Profession:** Student
4. **Age:** 21 years old
5. **Length of Volunteering with the GRP:** 3 months
6. **Describe your favorite day of work at the GRP:** There are many contenders, but I would suggest that my favourite day since arriving at GRP was when I was introduced to the Rest Centre. This is the area where individuals with severe physiological and behavioural problems are kept, to enable them to live out their days and to enjoy the company of other gibbons. Whilst they will never be able to be reintroduced to Khao Phra Thaew, they are an important part of the work that the GRP is involved in.

I had come from a conservation background – last summer, I graduated from a degree in Wildlife Conservation, based in Kent – but I have never done anything like this before. It is amazing to be so hands-on with the individuals in our care, and I have learned a great deal about husbandry and about some of the issues that arise in captive environments.

7. Describe the funniest moment from you time volunteering with the GRP?

I have been grabbed, my glasses were nearly removed on more than one occasion and the gibbons have left physical scars on my face, arms and back. However, as I have spent more time in their general vicinity I have realised that all of the posturing is merely bravado and curiosity. There was a new primate in their space, someone who they didn't recognise, and naturally they were nervous and wanted to let me know, in no uncertain terms, that this was their patch and that they didn't want me to be a part of it. At the same time, some of them seemed curious about who the new person was. Finally, there were some (mostly males!) who weren't interested in who I was, so long as I was carrying a food basket!

Those experiences made me laugh for two reasons. For one, it was funny to slowly learn their different characters and personalities. The male langur monkey, Jackie Chan, always greets me with rapid head-bobbing, a few short clicks and tweets, and a slight bodily twitching. I don't know if he was trying to scare me off or bow, but he did a good job at both! It was also funny because they are similar to children in the

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school playground – “I have more of this, these are bigger, mine is greater, everything you say plus one...” – always wanting to show you that they’re boss. It doesn’t fool me any more though.

8. Describe one of the gibbon/langur characters that you feel you have gotten to know a little bit during your time here.

One of the individuals who made a big impression on me, and continues to do so, is Mai. He has a very sad story, which makes his soft, gentle nature all the more appealing. He was due to be released in the forest, and had a baby with his mate. However, before the movement took place a snake entered the enclosure and killed his partner. The release was called off. Many years later, when another release possibility appeared after Mai had seen his second offspring born to his new partner, one of his eyes started to turn milky, and he developed cataracts in both his eyes. The GRP managed to make enough money from donations, both from the public and from private sources, and he was taken to a veterinary clinic in Bangkok. They revealed the sad news that both of his retinas were detached, and they could not operate – while they would have been able to remove his cataracts, there was nothing that could be done about this new problem.

I met Mai on my first morning at the Rest Centre. It was astonishing to see his eyes in such bad condition, but as I fed him, he put his hand through the mesh and slowly placed his hand on the rim of his feeding basket. I watched as his pianist’s fingers slowly grasped a piece of cucumber and once he knew he had purchase, he pulled it back through the mesh. It was a sweet and poignant moment, and it proved one of my greatest convictions – that, just because you have a condition that may be disadvantageous, it doesn’t mean that you can’t lead a healthy and worthwhile life.

If I finish early on other areas, or if I have a short break at lunchtime, I pay a visit to the centre, and say hello to him and the other long-term visitors. I have a quiet conversation with him, and he often comes down to the front of his enclosure and says ‘hello.’ I stand and chat to him for a few moments, and he is looking directly at me. His eyes may not function, but he knows where I am. We sit together and have a little conversation, and then I pull myself away. He often leaves a bit of food, so I give his basket a little shake, to encourage him to take a bit more. On one occasion, he put his hand through the mesh, as if he wanted me to hold it for a little while. I walked away with a heavy heart, but I was happy to spend time in his company.

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Learning about Mai provided me with an analogy for the planet at large: we may torture and abuse, we may cause the depletion of numbers and of diversity, and we may be responsible for catapulting one species' fortunes into the stratosphere while allowing others to descend to the realm of Hades; but we can always find the capacity to lead a dignified life, no matter the consequences of those previous actions. We can also allow others to lead a more dignified life, which can bring joy to all around us.

For me, Mai is a symbol of that because, quite simply, he *is* that life. Born in captivity due to the poaching and imprisonment of his parents, he was finally on his way back to the wild when more tragedy struck, taken away from his baby whom he never sees and never will see, incapable of grasping anything with conviction because he doesn't know what it is. Yet, he grasps the most important thing: life itself. That would be a worthwhile lesson for us all to learn.

Two New Arrivals at the GRP:



Two young male gibbons in their early teens, named **Willy** and **Brany**, arrived at the GRP on the 24th of April. Both gibbons have been living at our head-organization WARF's wildlife center in Ranong for around 10 years, but are now being given a chance to participate in GRP's gibbon match-making service and hopefully also eventually in our Reintroduction program. Both males suffer from the typical maternal deprivation behaviors that we often see in orphaned primates and are keen thumb-suckers. The two beautiful boys have been warmly received here at the GRP.

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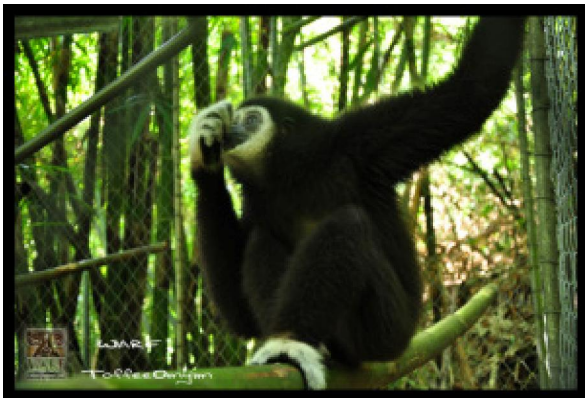


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Gibbon updates:

Maesa: It seems incredible how time flies, but Maesa has now turned 4 years old! Maesa, meaning April in Thai, is a playful member of our largest juvenile group, also containing her little sister Emily and their friends Arya, Phi Phi and Lumduan. Her playfulness in spite Maesa has also sadly retained some of her anxious mentality, which she gained when she was abandoned by her mother Nuan in her first weeks of life. Socializing with other young gibbons has certainly gone a long way in helping Maesa come out of her shell a bit, but within the play group Maesa remains the one most prone to self-hugging, thumb-sucking and other comforting behaviours. However, having gained valuable lessons in gibbon social etiquette lately, we are confident that Maesa will eventually overcome her anxieties and be able to raise her own family in the wild one day.



Beauty: Beauty has now been housed next to Dodo and Dr Tum for several months and after our observations have confirmed positive interests from all parties, the door has on a few occasions been opened to let the three of them spend time together. This is a particularly sensitive socialization due to the presence of little motherless Dr Tum (who turned 2-years this month), who we really would like to see accepted and adopted by Beauty, as well as due to Beauty's own negative experiences being socialized with males that turned around and attacked her (O and Champ). Fortunately Beauty seems smitten by little Dr Tum and Dodo is an easy-going father who allows Beauty to seek contact with his son. On the other hand Dodo's own attempts to establish a mature pair bond with Beauty, and to engage in activities that normally follows such a bond, have been met with confusion and even fear. We have hopes that this relationship can develop slowly and that Beauty will be able to grow into the idea...

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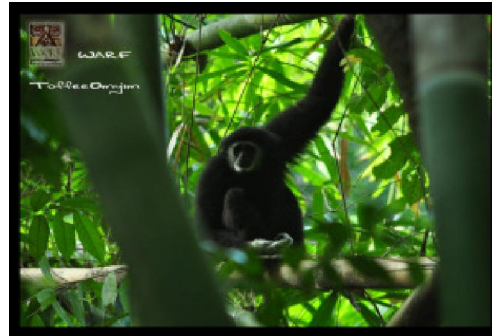


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Forest News:

Lek's family: This month we discovered Lek with a brand new baby, who probably was born sometime during the month of March. The family of Lek, Bank, big brother Peanut and the new baby has been monitored on several forest observation days this month and all four family members are doing very well. The baby is another boy and he was named "**KAI**" during a name-draw in a weekly staff and volunteer meeting. Kai is the 12th wild-born gibbon at our Reintroduction Site!



Lek's family (left) – Arun (right)

Toffee & Arun: In the past 3 years Arun has split up two forest families (Kushta and Kip) and sent old Nuan flying back to Rehab, rejected. Arun has managed to monopolize all the females in the neighborhood (Kushta, Nuan, Toffee, Kip), ward off any competition for the females' attention from their dependent offspring (Kushta's offspring Pee Mai and her new infant in 2011, the potential infant of Kip in 2013 and Kip's juvenile son Omyim) and he has also managed to install fear and respect in all the males in the area (Thong, Muki, Nat, Joe). Despite this – quite frankly, horrible – behavior it seems that 8-year old Toffee has actually fallen for him! During April the two have been seen travelling and grooming together on several occasions.

Cop's family: Cop, Jorn and Sherpa have been seen on several forest observation days this month and they continue to do very well. They have now been without food supplementation for 4 months so the fact that they are staying high and getting on with life as wild gibbons is a great sign – if they were hungry they would most likely climb down to greet the GRP staff and volunteers and check if they was any food going!

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Nat: Poor Nat (the last remaining member of the Kushta family in the forest) has made a living off shadowing Arun for the past 3 years. Now 10-year old Nat was actually quite keen on Nuan and would probably have established a firm bond with her had Arun not chased him away from her all the time. Of course, that was before Arun himself rejected Nuan and she made a voluntary return to our Rehabilitation Site. Then Nat was actually seen doing a sneaky mating with Kip whilst nervously scanning the surroundings for the appearance of Arun to reprimand him. It seems obvious that Nat was incredibly intimidated by Arun's presence and that this was hindering the normal development of a pair-bond between Nat and any of the area's females (all of which were dominated by Arun). In mid-April we were therefore not too surprised to find Nat visiting GRP's Rehabilitation Site, attracted here by our singing captive females. However, we were pleased to find Nat visiting his old flame from the forest, Nuan, trying to mate with her through the mesh. Nat has now been recaptured and plans are to introduce him to Nuan again and to release the two of them together – far away from Arun's territory – at the other side of our Reintroduction Site later this year.



Donations received from Centara Grand Beach Resort Hotel

GRP relies on public donations and volunteer assistance to carry out the work we do and we are therefore grateful for any support from local businesses on Phuket. On the 18th of April the Centara Grand Beach Resort paid GRP a visit in order to donate some funds that the hotel guests and staff had collected for us during Earth Hour Day this year. Thank you!!!



GRP's rescued slow lorises feasting on insects Pictures

The return of the rains here in Phuket has brought on a sudden explosion in greenery as well as animal life. This is the time of year when many insects come out to breed and the abundance of beetles has been a very welcome protein addition for our slow lorises!