

Remarks on The Occurrence of Gibbons in Central Java

Vincent Nijman

Zoological Museum, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

In the 1990 issue of *Primate Conservation*, Seitre and Seitre (1990) report on sightings of the two endemic Javan leaf monkeys *Presbytis comata* and *Trachypithecus auratus* on the southern slopes of Gunung Slamet [109° 13'E, 7° 19'S] in the western half of Central Java. In addition to these monkeys they also observed a single gibbon *Hylobates moloch*. Of this latter species, Seitre and Seitre (1990) state that "10 years ago, [this species] was only known to survive in central Java, in a 10 km² area of forest on Gunung Lawu." No reference for this is given.

Besides Seitre and Seitre, M. Riffel and C. Saleh (1994) in a preliminary project proposal also mention the occurrence of gibbons on Gunung Lawu, referring, however, to Kappeler (1984). In 1978, Kappeler (1984) conducted a survey on Javan gibbons and apart from a few individuals he found on Gunung Slamet, the only place in Central Java where the species seemed to be present in reasonable numbers was in a small forest block of 10 km² on Gunung Lawét [109° 30'E, 7° 15'S]. This was at the same time the easternmost record for the species.

It would seem that there is some confusion between Gunung Lawét and Gunung Lawu. Apart from Kappeler's papers I have not seen any reports which mention the name Gunung Lawét, nor have I seen any map with this name. Inhabitants of the region, however, are familiar with the name, and I therefore assume it is a local name only. Gunung Lawu [111° 11'E, 7° 40'S], in contrast, is a well known volcano on the border of Central and East Java, almost 200 km east of the former site. The impression could arise that Javan gibbon indeed occur on Gunung Lawu, but to the best of my knowledge there is no documentation about this whatsoever.

Given the confusion between Gunung Lawu and Gunung Lawét, and since it is almost 20 years after Kappeler's survey, it is perhaps important to give a brief update of our knowledge on the status and distribution of gibbons in Central Java.

The Javan gibbon is among the rarest and most endangered species of the genus (Eudey 1987). It is confined to closed canopy forest in the lowlands and mountains up to c. 1600 m, and only occurs in isolated pockets scattered throughout the western half of Java. The species' distribution corresponds with areas of the highest rainfall (Kappeler 1984), i.e., with the wettest vegetation types.

Java shows a striking contrast between the very wet climates in the west and the more seasonal, dry east; Central Java forms the climatic transition zone. Although most of the larger gibbon populations can be found in the western province, some still survive in the central province (Nijman and Sözer 1995). The most recent population estimate ranged from 386 (direct observations) to 1,957 individuals (estimated from the available habitat) (Supriatna *et al.* 1994), although none of the Central Javan populations were taken in account in these estimations.

Ten months of surveys by the author, together with R. Sözer and B. van Balen, in March-October 1994 and June-July 1995, in almost all larger forest tracts from Gunung Sawal [108° 16'E, 7° 12'S] in the eastern part of West Java to Gunung Liman-Wilis [111° 46'E, 7° 48'S] in the western part of East Java, revealed the presence of gibbons in three localities: The southern slopes of Gunung Segara [108° 48'E, 7° 07'S], the southern slopes of Gunung Slamet, and the western parts of Pegunungan Dieng [109° 37'E, 7° 05'S to 109° 43'E, 7° 10'S].

Gunung Segara is a small mountain situated in the north-eastern part of the Pembarisan mountains. Pegunungan Pembarisan consists of moderately disturbed lowland and hill forests ranging from c. 300 to 1351 m. Part of the area, c. 130 km², has been proposed as a nature reserve, and the entire area is considered by Mackinnon *et al.* (1982) to be of great value for conservation purposes. Gibbons may be present in the north-eastern part of the area only, as Kappeler (1984) reported the species to be absent from Gunung Pojok [108° 40'E, 7° 10'S] in the central part, although he did not actually survey the area.

Gibbons were observed frequently on the southern slopes of Gunung Slamet. The natural forests on this part of the mountain descend to altitudes of c. 700 m, and Seitre and Seitre (1990) rightly consider the area to be high priority for research on, and the conservation of, endangered primates.

However, the forests on Pegunungan Dieng are even more valuable. Gibbons were observed throughout the western half of this large forested area of c. 225 km². The observations of gibbons in the area extended the known range of the species (Nijman and Sözer 1995). Records were established from 300 to 1,300 m and, on the basis of the available habitat, the area probably harbors the

single largest population of gibbon on Java after the Halimun National Park in West Java (Nijman and van Balen unpubl. data).

None of the above forested areas are protected, although Mackinnon *et al.* (1982) has recommended that (parts of) all three areas should be. Pressure on the remaining forests on Java, and especially the lowland forests, remains high. The last forest remnants are still being destroyed. The establishment of protected areas in one, or preferably all three, forested areas is of prime importance for the survival of the eastern populations of the Javan gibbon. Especially important is the protection of the lowland forests of Pegunungan Dieng; a measure which is long overdue due to the fact that it harbors a significant proportion of the total world population of one of Indonesia's most endangered primates, and large parts in the westernmost part of the area are planned for conversion into rubber, pine or damar plantations.

We have not visited the isolated forest patch on Gunung Lawét, but local informants living in the north-western part of Pegunungan Dieng, confirmed the continued existence of forests on this mountain. Whether or not gibbons still occur there is not known. We did visit the southern and south-eastern slopes of Gunung Lawu on several occasions but no gibbons were found.

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Vincent Nijman
Institute for Systematics and Population Biology
Zoological Museum
University of Amsterdam
P.O. Box 94766
1090 GT Amsterdam
The Netherlands

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