

SEATO MEDICAL RESEARCH STUDY OF ECOLOGY OF GIBBONS*

Coordinatr: Gershon Berkson, Ph.D.**

Principal Investigator: Gershon Berkson, Ph.D.

Associate Investigators: Verachart Chaicumpa, DVM
Douglas J. Gould, Ph. D.
Joe T. Marshall, Jr., Ph. D.
Tem Smitinand, F. L. S.***
Jack S. Stanton, Maj, VC
Prayot Tanticharoenyos, DVM

Assistant Investigators: Bruce A. Ross, SP5
James P. Slowey, SSG
Lenly D. Wetherald, SSG

General Information

During the last year, the program has been concerned mainly with factors relevant to maintenance of sources of supply of gibbons for laboratory purposes. It included studies of breeding in the laboratory; further development of an island in the Gulf of Siam as a research station for ecological studies of primates of Thailand; observations of social behavior of gibbons in semi-natural and natural habitats; the application to gibbons of a radio-transmitter device for tracking animals in forests and development of a plan for conservation of gibbons.

The following major conclusions seem justified:

1. Given adequate housing, diet and compatible pairing, gibbons can be bred in laboratory environments. The eversion of the vulva which is normal to adult females regresses during pregnancy.
2. The behavior of tame gibbons differs markedly from that of feral gibbons. Nevertheless, most individuals of each type can be maintained in semi-natural habitats if water is available. More or less permanent normal pairings occur and copulation can take place.
3. Gibbon home ranges exceed 40 acres in natural habitats but are no larger than 8 acres at the island facility where cover is thick and where food and water are freely available. In such a situation, social factors are the main determinants of territory size and shifts. Gibbons live and reproduce in 15-acre isolated forest patches.
4. Radio tracking of gibbons in the forest is feasible.

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** Delta Regional Primate Research Center

***Royal Thai Forest Department.