

GIBBON RELEASE PROGRAM

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OBJECTIVE : To release gibbons housed in the AFRIMS animal colony that were no longer utilized for research. Secondary objectives were to observe their ability to adapt to their natural habitat and their interaction with wild gibbons in the release area.

BACKGROUND : In January, 1976, it was decided that gibbons no longer utilized for research by the AFRIMS Medical Research Laboratory would be released in certain forested areas of Thailand.

The gibbons were selected for release based on breeding history, age, general health, compatibility and completion of research utilization. They were released either in family groups composed of the sire, dam and offspring; in pairs consisting of a compatible male and female with no offspring; or individually when an animal was found to be incompatible with all other available gibbons or had no suitable mate. Of the 31 gibbons selected for release 25 had spent six to eleven years in captivity and the remainder were colony born.

Several release areas situated throughout Thailand were studied and it was concluded that all gibbons would be released in the forested area of the Protein Expansion Project (PEP) at Sai Yok, Kanchanaburi. Several reasons were considered in the selection of this area, the most important of these being (1) it was a natural habitat of gibbons and contained wild groups of gibbons of the same species; (2) the native gibbon population was such that the area would accommodate the AFRIMS gibbons; (3) there was an abundance of fruit and water in the area, and (4) the area is protected by the Royal Thai Army and hunting is not allowed. Four separate release sites were selected. Each site was separated by a distance of at least one kilometer from the others and was selected based on its proximity to humans, suitable terrain and location of native primate family groups.

METHODS : Prior to release each gibbon was given a complete physical examination. A Certificate of Permission to Transport and Release was obtained from the Forestry Department for each animal determined to be in good health and suitable for release. In those cases that an animal was determined unsuitable for release, i.e. parasitic infestation, the entire family group was retained until the condition was corrected.

On the day of release each gibbon was tranquilized at the AFRIMS animal colony and transported to Sai Yok by vehicle. Upon arrival at Sai Yok each animal was anesthetized with Serylan^(R), given a final visual examination and carried by hand to the preselected release site. At the release site the animals were observed until they were conscious and capable of normal movement.

A Thai employee of the PEP, was retained to monitor the activity of the gibbons following their release. Also periodic visits to each release site was made by AFRIMS personnel. On these visits the adaptation of the AFRIMS gibbon to its new environment was noted.

RESULTS : During the seventeen month period 31 gibbons were released (Table 1), three of which returned to local houses where they were captured and taken to the PEP headquarters. These were subsequently released at more remote sites; two did not return but the other continued to return to the PEP headquarters and was finally donated by the PEP personnel to the local Wat where he resided until the time of his death.

Only three of the gibbons are known to have died. One adult was found dead in the forest, one infant died of transportation stress and exposure within twelve hours after release and the animal donated to the Wat died of pneumonia.

Three gibbons were later observed in the company of wild gibbon families and two others were observed with bite wounds resulting from fights with wild gibbons.

At the present time there are seven gibbons in the AFRIMS animal colony still being utilized in research projects.

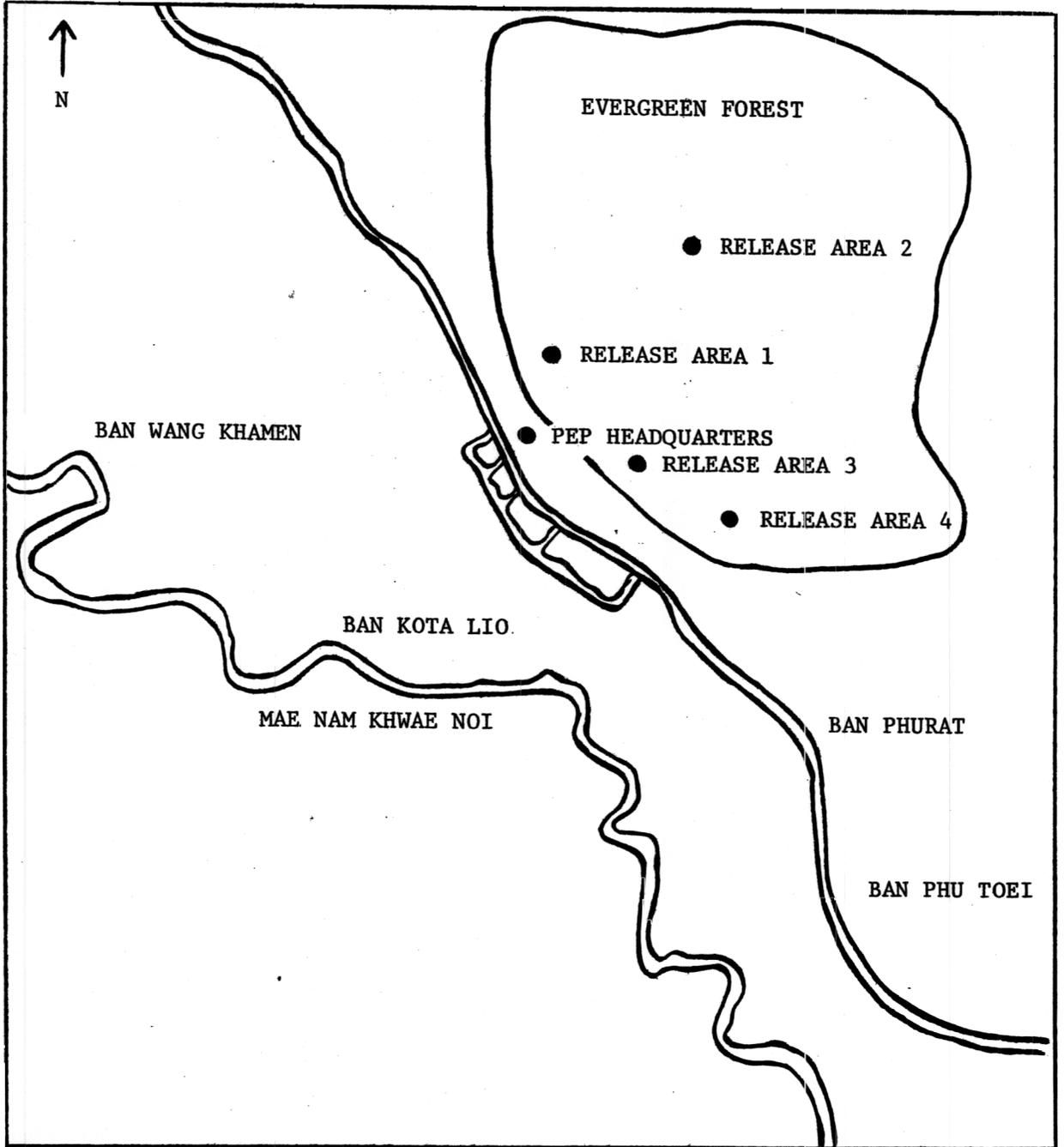
Table 1. Gibbons Released at Sai Yok - February 1976 to June 1977.

| <u>FAMILY GROUPS</u> | | | | | |
|----------------------|-------------|------------|------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| <u>Family#</u> | <u>Sire</u> | <u>Dam</u> | <u>Offspring</u> | <u>Date Released</u> | <u>Area*</u> |
| 1 | B82 | Pc1 | Pc33 | 9 July 1976 | 1 |
| 2 | B8 | B6 | Pc20 | 11 May 1977 | 4 |
| 3 | B64 | B11 | Pc32 | 25 May 1977 | 1 |
| 4 | B163 | B59 | Pc35 | 8 June 1977 | 4 |
| 5 | S18 | V175 | Pc36 | 15 June 1977 | 2 |

| <u>PAIRS</u> | | | | |
|---------------|-------------|------------|----------------------|-------------|
| <u>Pair #</u> | <u>Sire</u> | <u>Dam</u> | <u>Date Released</u> | <u>Area</u> |
| 1 | VM61 | B143 | 18 Feb 1976 | 1 |
| 2 | B83 | P2 | 18 Feb 1976 | 1 |
| 3 | B61 | B66S | 9 June 1976 | 1 |
| 4 | B56 | S81 | 21 Mar 1977 | 4 |
| 5 | P16 | B7 | 20 Apr 1977 | 1 |

| <u>INDIVIDUALS</u> | | | |
|--------------------|------------|----------------------|-------------|
| <u>Gibbon#</u> | <u>Sex</u> | <u>Date Released</u> | <u>Area</u> |
| S83 | M | 9 June 1976 | 3 |
| P5 | M | 9 June 1976 | 3 |
| B88 | F | 17 Aug 1976 | 1 |
| B89 | F | 17 Aug 1976 | 4 |
| B90 | F | 17 Aug 1976 | 4 |
| S82 | F | 17 Aug 1976 | 1 |

* Key to location of areas given on Map 1.



MAP 1. BAN SAI YOK AREA