# White-handed Gibbon (Lar Gibbon)

**Updated:** October 1, 2018

## Interpretation Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>SSP – Yellow Endangered (IUCN Red List)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Danger</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Threats</td>
<td>They are hunted both for subsistence food use and for the pet trade. The primary predators of the white-handed gibbon are leopards, clouded leopards, and man.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>Wild: 79,000 Decreasing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Captivity:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distribution</td>
<td>The species is found in northern Sumatra (Indonesia), throughout most of Peninsular Malaysia, north through southern and eastern Myanmar (east of the Salween River), most of Thailand (though not in the north-east), and marginally into southern China. The species also occurs in a small area of northwestern Lao Peoples Democratic Republic (west of the Mekong River).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Habitat</td>
<td>This species is found in evergreen, semi-evergreen, and mixed evergreen-deciduous forest.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diet</td>
<td>Wild: Figs, as well as young shoots, leaves, some flowers, and insects.</td>
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<td>Zoo Knoxville:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>Length: 17-25 inches</td>
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<td>Weight: 11-13.2 pounds</td>
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<td>Longevity</td>
<td>Wild: About 25 years</td>
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<td>Captivity:</td>
<td>About 45 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Family Units</td>
<td>White-handed gibbons live in small groups that are centered on the mated pair. Young gibbons leave these groups in adolescence. These family groups defend their territories by song and threat display. These songs are usually initiated by the female and are a duet with specific parts. It seems that these songs are innate and not learned. They are specific to the species. At night, white-handed gibbons sleep sitting up in groups in “sleeping” trees. These trees are usually off limits for other groups.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reproduction</td>
<td>They mature late, with females maturing at 8-10 years and males at 8-12 years, and have one offspring every 3 to 5 years (Brockelman et al. 1998; W. Brockelman pers. comm.). If a female loses a baby, she may come into estrus sooner, but the average inter-birth interval in a population at carrying capacity is about 3.5 years (W. Brockelman pers. comm.). Young white-handed gibbons are born hairless and must rely on their mothers for warmth. They usually have light hair at first and darker hair develops as they grow older. Young gibbons will stay with their parents until they are past adolescence and are chased off by their parents.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Our Animals</td>
<td>We have 3 white-handed gibbons. Nipper, female, has black fur. She was a donation from a private owner and came to Zoo Knoxville in 1974. She was on loan to the Nashville Zoo from 1990 to 1997. She remains on exhibit near Aldo’s Grill. Because of her age, her curators decided not to move her to Gibbon Trails. Georgie, male, has blonde hair. Georgie is very energetic! Georgie’s habitat is at Gibbon Trails in the Boyd Family Asian Trek. Our newest gibbon is Malay. She has joined Georgie at Gibbon Trails.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Scientific Name | Order: Mammalia  
|                | Family: Hylobatidae  
|                | *Genus: Hylobates*  
|                | *Species: lar* |
**Additional Information**

**Our White-handed Gibbons**

**Nipper**
- Sex: Female
- Birth: c. 1967
- Born at: Wild born-Thailand
- Origin: Private Owner

**Georgie**
- Sex: Male
- Birth: October 5, 2003
- Born at: Omaha’s Henry Doorly Zoo, Omaha, NE
- Origin: Same

**Malay**
- Sex: Female
- Birth: June 24, 2000
- Born at: Utica Zoo, Utica, NY
- Origin: Lincoln Children’s Zoo, Lincoln, NE

**Habitat Information**
Nipper is in an enclosure is just south of the back of Aldo’s Grill.
Georgie is at Gibbon Trails at the Boyd Family Asian Trek. A search is underway for a suitable partner for Georgie.

**Status**

**Danger**

**Threats**

**Population**
Wild: Gibbon populations are de-creasing, so much in fact, that a once thriving species is now close to extinction! Mainly this decline is because of loss of natural habitat. This is due to human agriculture encroaching on it.
Captivity:

**Distribution**

**Habitat**
These very acrobatic primates live in tropical rainforest's in southeast Asia. Gibbons are arboreal, meaning they spend most of their time in trees. Gibbons do not construct nests, but show preference for specific "sleeping trees", where no other families stay. They sleep sitting erect in trees, huddled in groups of two or three.

**Ecosystem Relationships**
Predators: Leopards, clouded leopards, man
Interspecies Competitors:
Role/Niche:

**Diet**
Wild: Gibbons are omnivores (eating plants and meat). In the wild, gibbons forage for food in the forests during the day. They tend to eat mostly fruit, about 75% of their diet. Also, leaves, flowers, seeds, tree bark, and tender plant shoots, insects, spiders, bird eggs, and sometimes small birds. Gibbons drink lots of water by dipping their furry hands into water or rubbing a hand on wet leaves, and then slurping up the water from their fur!
Zoo Knoxville:

**Size**

**Longevity**

**Social Family Units**
Gibbons are VERY social animals that are active during the day! Gibbons, in the wild, can be territorial. Upon awakening, the family of gibbons spend up to 30 minutes, or more, announcing their presence in the forest. Basically this is warning other gibbons to stay away! The function of calling is both territorial and to increase the bond in a pair. The white-handed gibbon is distinguish by its musical howl. They tend to be extremely vocal making loud "woop" noises. Their loud songs can often be heard up to 1/2 a mile away. Gibbons, to maintain a relationships, sing what is called a duet between a male and female pair. This is mostly dominated by the female.

**Reproduction**
Gibbons mate for life. These families consist of a mated pair and all offspring. Gibbons are fully grown and able to reproduce at 12-13 years old. Female gibbons are pregnant for 7 months. They usually give birth to 1 baby; twins are a rarity. When the baby is born, it travels with the mother by grasping the mother's fur. Female gibbons carefully nurture their offspring. When the gibbon is born, their eyes are open and the limbs are bare of fur. For this reason, they are dependent on their mother's for warmth. The baby is weaned at about 2 years old, however, young gibbons, stay with their mothers for 8 years, until the time comes for them to venture out and begin a family-group of their own.

**Animal Neighbors in the Wild**

**Caring for Animals**

**Enrichment**

**Behaviors**
They possess an opposable thumb that is used for climbing or grooming, but not for swinging from branch to branch. White-handed gibbons usually move in this manner and can cover horizontal distances of 40 feet and vertical of 50 feet in one swing. They launch themselves and freefall until they catch another branch. They can move bipedally along branches or on the ground. When doing so, white-handed gibbons raise their arms above their heads for balance. White-handed gibbons are diurnal and usually take a rest break during the hottest part of the day.

**Communication/Vocalization**
White-handed gibbons use songs as their main mode of communication. These “songs” are sung in duets by the mating pair and used to mark territories. Each morning they gather at the edge of their territory and partake in a great call; each subspecies has specific variations of the theme of these calls, and these variations are used to distinguish one from another.

**Conservation Efforts by Zoo Knoxville**

**Did you know?**
The white-handed gibbon is also known as the lar gibbon, which is reflected in the taxonomic name of the species.

White-handed gibbons are small, tailless apes with dense, shaggy fur ranging from black to pale gray. Their face is bare and surrounded by a white fringe. White-handed gibbons have long, slender arms and the upper part of their hands and feet is always white.

A group of white-handed gibbons is collectively known as a “family.”

They are the most bipedal of all primates, other than humans. This physical characteristic has been studied for years to determine what evolutionary compulsion led humankind to become bipedal.

Gibbons are primates, who are in fact very unique! Gibbons eat ONLY ripe fruits, whereas most primates simply eat what they can find. Gibbons can reach these fruits and insects hanging by their hands and feet. They are extremely agile!

White-handed gibbons inhabit the rainforests in Asia, where they rarely come to the ground, preferring instead to use their long arms to navigate through the trees.

**Biofacts**
Biofacts may be available for this species. Contact Volunteer Coordinator for more information.

**SPECIES SURVIVAL PLAN (SSP)**

It is AZA’s cooperative breeding and conservation program. Members agree to manage and exchange animals in the best interest of the species.

The mission is to help ensure the survival of selected wildlife species.

All SSP Programs fall into one of three categories. Here are some characteristics of each.

**GREEN**—These programs are the most sustainable over time. They have a published regional studbook. The population can maintain a genetic diversity of >90% for 100 years or 10+ generations. The species is managed by at least three AZA member institutions.

**YELLOW**—These programs are potentially sustainable, but need additional attention to increase sustainability. They have a published regional studbook. There are at least 50 animals in the population. The population is not able to maintain at least 90% genetic diversity for 100 years or 10+ generations. They are managed by at least three AZA member institutions.

**RED**—These programs are not currently genetically sustainable. Additional animals are needed. They have a published regional studbook. Current population is between 20 and 50 individuals. They are managed by at least three AZA member institutions.

**CANDIDATE (PURPLE)**—These are animal programs which hope to grow into an SSP program. There are generally 19 or fewer animals and/or are held at only one or two institutions. They do not currently have a published regional studbook.
FINAL NOTE—Animal programs that manage species designated Extinct in the Wild, Critically Endangered, or Endangered (IUCN-see next) do not need to meet minimum population size and number of participating institutions criteria to be designated as an SSP Program. These SSP Programs only need to have a published AZA Regional Studbook and three defined goals.

INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES (IUCN)

For the past 50 years, this organization has been assessing the conservation status of species, subspecies and varieties around the world. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (IUCN Red List) provides information and analyses on the status, trends and threats to species in order to inform and catalyze action for biodiversity conservation. 79,800 species have been assessed today. The goal is to assess 160,000 species by 2020. This includes vertebrates, invertebrates, plants, and fungi and other species groups. Much more information can be found at www.iucnredlist.org. Assessed species are placed in one of nine categories. There are criteria which must be met to place a species in a specific category. This information is available on the website. These are brief descriptions.

**EXTINCT (EX):** There is no reasonable doubt that the last individual has died.

**EXTINCT IN THE WILD (EW):** Survivors exist only in cultivation, in captivity, or as a naturalized population well outside of its native range.

**CRITICALLY ENDANGERED (CR):** The species faces an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild.

**ENDANGERED (EN):** The species faces a very high risk of extinction in the wild.

**VULNERABLE (VU):** The species faces a high risk of extinction in the wild.

**NEAR THREATENED (NT):** The species is close to qualifying for or is likely to qualify for a threatened category in the near future.

**LEAST CONCERN (LC):** The species does not meet any of the criteria for any of the endangered categories. There are widespread and abundant populations.

**DATA DEFICIENT (DD):** Information is not sufficient to make a direct, or indirect, assessment of the risk of extinction based on its distribution and/or population status.

**NOT EVALUATED (NE):** The species has not been evaluated against the criteria.