

Washington University bowled over by Gibbon sanctuary

Wasim Rahman | TNN

Jorhat: The University of Washington has chosen Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary under Mariani forest range in Jorhal district to carry out an international field course on conservation biology.

The course, to be held in the country for the first time, was conducted in collaboration with the Gibbon Research Centre (GRC), set up within the GWC in 2004 as a joint venture with Aranyak, an NGO working in wildlife conservation, and the Assam forest department. The study was aimed at carrying out research work on Hollock Gibbon, the only lesser ape found in India.

Of the 11 primate species found in the North-East, seven species are found in Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary, which has only just 20 sq km. Perhaps no sanctuary in the world houses seven species of the ape, which include some critically endangered ones. Professor Randall C Kyes, head of the Centre for Global Field Study and core scientist of the National Primates Research Centre, told TOI that the Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary could be termed as a "paradise of primates" not only in Asia, but across the world. Incidentally, the Centre for Global Field Study and the National Primates Research Centre are branches of the University of Washington.

Kyes, who is also the president of American Society of Primatologists, was in the Mariani sanctuary as the key expert to conduct the field course from February 6 to 11 among a group of select 16 wildlife lovers, environment activists, research scholars and forest officials. He said his university had selected the Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary as the venue to conduct the course with GRC as there was hardly any place in the world with such a diversity.

"In the last 20 years, I have been visiting forests and jungles across the globe, but I have never found such a beautiful forest like the one here — tiny yet with so much bio-diversity. Apart from the seven species of primates living together, there are elephants, leopards, reptiles and a huge variety of birds in such a small area. It's remarkable," Kyes said.