

Project Update: January 2002

Since December 2000 the team has been developing conservation activities in partnership with the Forest Protection Department of Mu Cang Chai district, and the people of Che Tao forests. Although Che Tao is small in area, it is sufficiently large to allow gibbons to flourish should the current activities of habitat reduction and hunting be halted. It is estimated that the proposed Species and Habitat Conservation Area, which covers about 15,000ha, would support about 600 individuals, should the population be allowed to recover. Surveys indicate that a viable population currently exists in the area.

Discussions with local communities revealed "pride value" as the key to success in protecting the gibbons and forest of Che Tao. The primary aim of the Special Use Forest is to protect the last viable population of western black crested gibbons in Vietnam. The second aim is to provide suitable conditions for communities to benefit from the forest in terms of forest resource extraction, on which they are dependent.

The feasibility study and investment plan have been submitted to the Government, and it is hoped that official sanction for the protected area will be obtained by the end of 2002. Meanwhile, conservation work in Che Tao is ongoing, seeking to mitigate the impact of road construction through the forest, and equipping rangers so that they can operate effectively. A great deal of information is being exchanged with other areas in the regions, where conservation education activities are also underway.