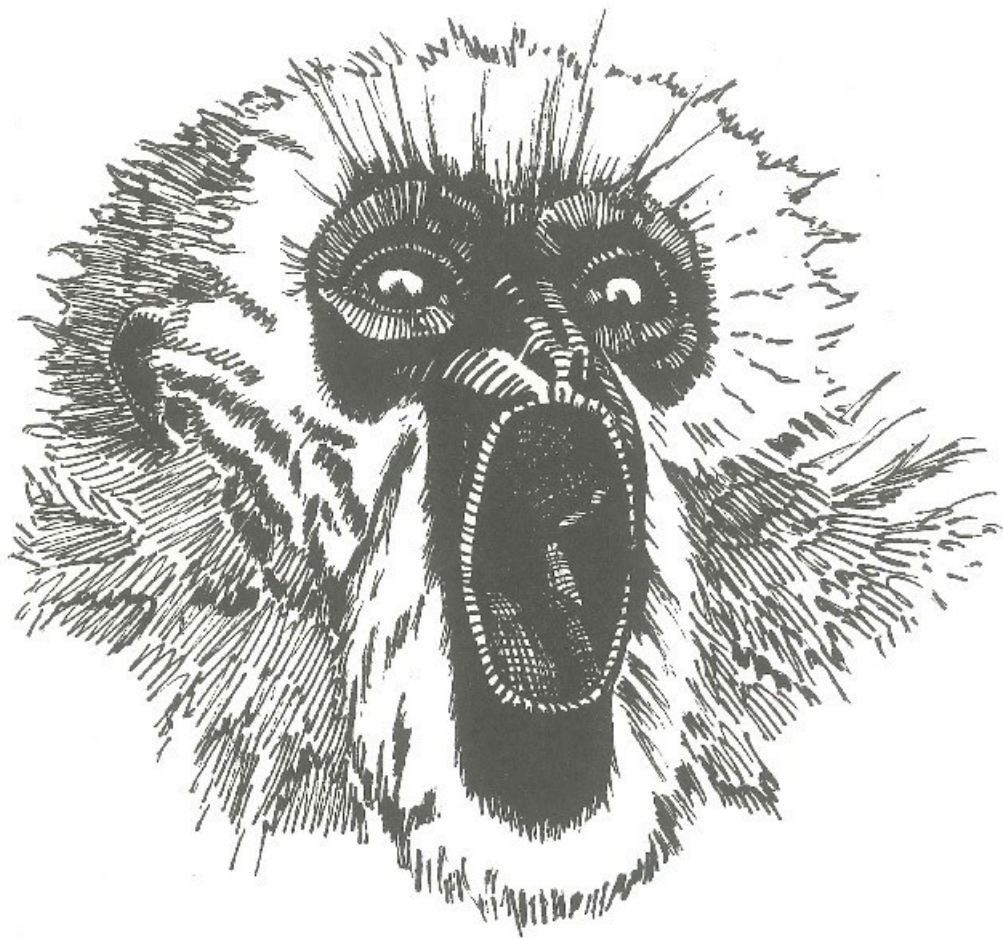


GIBBON STORIES, MYTHS AND LEGENDS FROM THAILAND

Updated 11th November 2024

We present these stories, myths and legends to highlight the cultural importance of gibbons in habitat countries. We must start with a clear statement that consuming any part of a gibbon has **no medicinal value** and that gibbons must **not be kept as a pet** (it is illegal everywhere). So please do enjoy these stories, but remember they are just stories.



THAILAND (Source: (Raemaekers & Raemaekers 1990))

The Legend of the Singing Ape

Legend has it that this is how the gibbon came to be. There was a certain prince who studied under a hermit in a great wood. When his studies were complete, the prince left the wood to return to his own country to ascend the throne. As he left the hermit gave him a silver casket. "Now in this casket is a gift for you. But if you open it before you reach the safety of your kingdom, the gift will be lost to you".

The prince thanked the hermit and vowed to do as the old man had said. He tucked the casket under his arm and set out for his kingdom. But the journey was a long one, and as the days and weeks passed, the temptation to open the mysterious casket grew, until at last he could resist it no longer and drew back the lid. Out stepped the most beautiful woman he had ever set eyes on. At once the prince fell in love with her and when she returned his love, he took her to be his wife.

Then the prince thought no more of his country, and of the destiny which awaited him there, but wandered in idle bliss through the woods with his lady. But one day they were waylaid by a brigand, who drew his sword and told the prince to fight for the woman. They fought bitterly for an hour, at the end of which, the brigand with a great stroke dashed the prince to the ground, and his sword fell to the ground beyond his reach and near the feet of the woman.

"My love," he gasped, "If you cherish my life, hand me my sword". But the woman looked at the prince, and she looked at the bold brigand, and she left the sword where it lay. Then the brigand killed the prince and took the woman, who went with him willingly.

Now by and by the hermit came to the place where the prince lay dead, and he knew what had happened. Moved by his memories of the days teaching the young man, he breathed life into the body and forgetfulness of what had happened. As the prince rose up, the hermit withdrew unseen into the woods. But with the woman the hermit was moved to anger: he turned her into a gibbon, filling her with shame at her betrayal, and rekindling the flame of her former love for the prince. From that day to this she has roamed the forest in search of her lover, but ever in vain, and the mournful song that

you may hear of a morning, rising from the trees, is her song of remorse.

References and Sources

Daniel BA, Molur P, Walker S (2007) Help(ing) Hoolock Gibbons Hang on: A Manual to make Every Teacher a Conservationist and Every Conservationist a Teacher.

Geissmann T, Grindley ME, Lwin N, Aung SS, Aung TN, Htoo SB, Momberg F (2013) The conservation status of hoolock gibbons in Myanmar. Gibbon Conservation Alliance, Zürich, Switzerland

Raemaekers JJ, Raemaekers PM (1990) The Singing Ape: a journey through the jungles of Thailand. The Siam Society, Bangkok, Thailand

Turvey S, Bryant J, McClune K (2019) Differential loss of components of traditional ecological knowledge following a primate extinction event. R Soc Open Sci 5:172352

Zhang P (2015) Good gibbons and evil macaques: a historical review on cognitive features of non-human primates in Chinese traditional culture. Primates 56:215–225