

Yunnan Primate Feb 2023 and Apr 2023

This is a very brief trip report from Yunnan, China I did in February and a Black crested gibbon trip in April this year. I wasn't planning on writing this because basically you go to one place and only see one species. But maybe someone also has huge interests in primate would find this useful.

The trip started from Lijiang, Yunnan. I had 3 days there and was suppose to visit the Laojun mountain for the blood pheasant. But it has been snowing so the pheasant will not show up to the feeder. I skipped the spot and head straight for the Yunnan snub-nose monkey park. The park is located in Tacheng, which is 4 hr drive from Lijiang airport, 3 hr drive from Xianggelila airport. Going there is pretty straightforward. You buy a ticket with an ID, and then ride a shuttle bus to the place where the monkeys are. The park usually only opens in the morning, but during major holidays, they will open full day. I visited the park for two days. The experience is more like a zoo. The ranger will bring bags of lichens to feed the monkeys. Therefore the monkeys are very habituated to humans, you can be within touching distance to the monkey. Normally, they change their feeding spot everyday. But I'm visiting during the Lunar new year holiday, many tourists will visit here. So they only feed the monkey at the most easily accessible spot.



From there, I travelled to Mang City by plane to see the Shan State Langur (*Trachypithecus melamera*). The langur was formerly identified as a subspecies of Phayre's langur, but elevated to species status in 2020. There is a forest close to the city that has a few groups of this langur. Rangers can take people to see and photograph the langur. There is one road that is very easy to walk and can see the langurs in the afternoon from 80+m. If you want to see the langurs more closely, you will need to hike in the forest with a lot of ups and downs but still no guarantees you can see them closer. There are several groups of the langur in this forest. And there are 13 babies this year alone, therefore I believe they are doing quite well. Other than the langur, only saw one black giant squirrel.



Following Mang City, I went to Baihualing scenic spot which is a extremely popular birdwatching site. I stayed there and tried two times to see the skywalker gibbon in Gaoligong Mountain Reserve but failed. The rangers are not allowed to take tourists to see the gibbon anymore. So they stopped monitor the gibbons because of no tourists income supplement. But you can still see them if you hear their call in the morning. I did that for 2 mornings and failed. I did one spotlighting in Baihualing, and only found a Yunnan Giant Flying Squirrel.

Since we dipped the gibbon here. We moved to the Zhina County, which also has skywalker gibbons, but 6 hr drives away. I have been to that place two years ago. But didn't get any good photos, so I want to try again. That place also has one main road ccircle the village that is very easy to walk. But you need a lot of luck to see them there. Basically, you will need to follow the rangers in this hilly terrain. The gibbons are semi habituated, they know the rangers but not you. So once you showed up, they will start to move. And you follow them for 2 to 3 hours until they are used to you. Then you can view them for an extended time. The first day is pretty amazing, we followed the monkey for a while and spent a long time watching their behavior. Even saw them mating. The second day, we followed the gibbons for only a little bit and they quickly moved to the inaccessibly part of the forest. The skywalker gibbon looks almost identical to the Western hoolock gibbon. We tried spotlighting in the nearby village. Didn't see a single thing except an eyeshine from a potentially leopard cat very far away.



For the black crested gibbon in Wuliangshan nature reserve (the place Coke Smith visited many years ago). The reserve is about 6 hours drive from the airport. I did get one permit before I went. But nobody actually check my documents. There is one hotel near the ranger station, but I opted to stay in the guide Xiong's house because of the office politics. Xiong is the guy who monitor the gibbons so for me this is better. I spent 3 days in the forest with the gibbons. There are several groups of gibbons, some are in very difficult and dangerous terrain that the rangers will not take any tourists to go there. Only one group stay relatively close to the village.

The first day, because of light rain, the gibbon didn't sing when we go into the forest. But after about an hour hike, the gibbons started to sing, so we followed the sound and found the gibbons. The gibbons are habituated so you can get quite close to them, at times too close for my 500mm lense. They will mostly ignore your presents, but one young individual is always curious about us, and sometimes will spend his time and watching us. This day we followed the gibbon in the hilly terrain for the whole day, the gibbons were very active. I can barely keep up. The gibbons will start to find a place to stay the night at around 3 or 4 pm. We have to keep up and know there roost, so we can find them again tomorrow.

Probably because of too much activities yesterday, the gibbons didn't move a lot. We basically sat under them for the whole day.

Day 3 was a little more exciting. We located the gibbons again. The gibbons all sat around a big nest. There was a masked palm civet there. The gibbons wanted to hunt but were also timid. So when the civet started to run, some of them quickly followed. None of the gibbons dare to catch the civet, but during this chaos, the group got separated and swung away too fast to follow. We later found a lone female that didn't stop to give a photo op.

Other than the gibbons and the civet, I saw one red muntjac in the morning when going in the forest and one spotted giant flying squirrel.

Note: The gibbons here regularly hunts flying squirrels but the civet is much larger.

The indochinese grey langur are still here but they move around between the accessible part and unaccessible part, I wasn't lucky enough to see them.

Between Dec to Feb is the best time to see the gibbons. They will stay much closer to the ranger station because of fruiting trees. You won't need to hike for many hours like I did in the first day.



Species list:

Yunnan Giant Flying Squirrel - *Petaurista yunnanensis*

Spotted Giant Flying Squirrel - *Petaurista elegans*

Red Muntjac - *Muntiacus vaginalis*

Black Crested Gibbon - *Nomascus concolor*

Shan State Langur - *Trachypithecus melamera*

Yunnan Snub nosed Monkey - *Rhinopithecus bieti*

Skywalker gibbon - *Hoolock tianxing*

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