

VILLAGERS RESIST SANCTUARY TAG FOR LANGUR HABITAT

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Biodiversity, Ecology, and Wildlife Related Issues

Golden Langur

Neighbours of a golden langur habitat in western Assam's Bongaigaon district have opposed a move by the State government to upgrade it to a wildlife sanctuary.

Kakoijana Reserve Forest is one of the better-known homes of the golden langur (*Trachypithecus geei*) found only in Assam and Bhutan and a Schedule-I species under the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972. It is listed as among the world's 25 most endangered primates.

The Assam Forest Department had in January issued a preliminary notification for converting the 19.85 sq. km. patch of forest into the Kakoijana Bamuni Hill Wildlife Sanctuary.

Sustainable conversion

In a memorandum to Bongaigaon Deputy Commissioner M.S. Lakshmi Priya, the villagers of Bogoriguri Rabhapara said they have been protecting and conserving the flora and fauna of Kakoijana Reserve Forest for more than 25 years.

The memorandum submitted on February 2 was on behalf of 34 villages around Kakoijana inhabited by the Koch-Rajbongshi, Boro, Garo, Rabha and Gorkha communities. As primary stakeholders, the villagers demanded that the "conventional idea of wildlife sanctuary" be dropped and the reserve forest converted into a community forest resource "using Forest Rights Act, 2006, to ensure community co-managed system of participation for sustainable conservation".

"We consider some of the areas inside the forest as sacred and its sanctity should be maintained. The joint forest management committee in the surrounding villages are doing a good job in protecting the forest and have an intricate relation with the forest," the memorandum said.

Efforts of conservation

The villagers pointed out that the conservation efforts of the locals had helped the authorities concerned to restore the forest canopy from less than 5% to more than 70%.

This in turn helped increase the golden langur population from less than 100 to more than 600 over almost three decades.

Ms. Lakshmi Priya, down with COVID-19, said an update can be provided after the issue is studied.

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