

GOLDEN LANGUR TO GET FRUITS OF MGNREGA

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

A richer habitat: A baby golden langur with its mother in Guwahati zoo. | Photo Credit: [AP](#)

For the first time since it became law in 2005, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) will have non-human beneficiaries — the rare golden langur (*Trachypithecus geei*) in a reserve forest in western Assam's Bongaigaon district.

On June 5, the district authorities launched a 27.24-lakh project under the MGNREGA to plant guava, mango, blackberry and other fruit trees to ensure that the resident golden langurs of the 17 sq.km. Kakoijana Reserve Forest do not have to risk their lives to find food. Several golden langurs have died due to electrocution and in road accidents while looking for food beyond the reserve forests.

Community-based conservation by local NGOs involving 34 villages around the reserve helped the low golden langur population in Kakoijana rise to 500 by 2015. But scarce food saw some of them set up colonies in forest patches such as Malegarh, Nigamghola and Bhumeshwar nearby.

"This is the first time MGNREGA is being used with a focus on food for a primate species. The project entails planting 10,575 saplings and seedlings of fruit-bearing trees," Adil Khan, Deputy Commissioner, told *The Hindu* from Bongaigaon. The Assam Forest Department and local communities will maintain the saplings.

"The State electricity distribution unit has worked on our proposal to insulate overhead wires around Kakoijana. A part has been done while the rest is being implemented. The highway authorities have also put up signs for speed regulation at vulnerable points," Mr. Khan said.

Wildlife activists have lauded the Bongaigaon administration's step, but said the effort can be sustained only if Kakoijana is declared a wildlife sanctuary.

"Kakoijana was once contiguous with the Chakrashila Wildlife Sanctuary, about 40 km away and straddling adjoining Dhubri and Kokrajhar districts. The joint forest management approach for Kakoijana, enabling people to interfere, is not a long-term solution," said Soumyadeep Dutta of the green group Nature's Beckon.

Mr. Dutta's group had fought for 12 years to earn the status for the 45.5 sq. km. Chakrashila, India's first wildlife sanctuary with golden langur as the primary species. Chakrashila has about 600 golden langurs whose population is scattered across western Assam and the foothills of Bhutan.

"The scattering of golden langurs in small groups is not a good sign. The primate needs to be concentrated in viable areas such as Kakoijana," Mr. Dutta said.

Officials said there are about 1,400 golden langurs, currently classified as endangered, in India.

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The study uses tree ring records to reconstruct the Asian summer monsoon back to 1566.

This is in connection with a proposal to ban walkers

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