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Cover: Digital illustration of Smooth-coated Otter *Lutrogale perspicillata* by Dupati Poojitha. Reference from the picture taken by Rana & Sugandhi.



First camera-trap evidence of a ferret badger *Melogale* sp. (Mammalia: Carnivora: Mustelidae) from the community forests of Manipur, India

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Abstract: Individuals of *Melogale* sp. were photographed on multiple occasions through camera traps deployed in the community forest of Godha Village under Phungyar Sub-Division of Kamjong District, in Manipur, India. The species were photographed from fragmented forest patches along the village's vicinity. The species was identified only at the genus level based on morphometric characteristics and may either be Small-toothed Ferret Badger *Melogale moschata* or Large-toothed / Burmese Ferret Badger *M. personata* as it was not possible to confirm at species level simply based on camera-trap images. The study represents the first confirmed camera-trap record of *Melogale* sp. from the community forest of Manipur ascertaining the distribution records of these lesser-known species from northeastern India. It further supports their nocturnal foraging behaviour and elusive nature in the wild.

Keywords: Burmese Ferret Badger, Chinese Ferret Badger, distribution, fragmented forest, Large-toothed Ferret Badger, lesser-known carnivore, *Melogale moschata*, *Melogale personata*, northeastern India, Small-toothed Ferret Badger.

Ferret badgers, namely, the Chinese or Small-toothed Ferret Badger *Melogale moschata* and the Large-toothed or Burmese Ferret Badger *M. personata* are among the lesser-known species from the family Mustelidae that

are indigenous to eastern and southeastern Asia. While a number of reports are available on the distribution, ecology, and diet on other groups of badgers such as the Hog Badger *Arctonyx collaris* and the Honey Badger *Mellivora capensis*; the genus *Melogale* remains the least studied of badgers (Shepherd 2012; Thomas et al. 2021). They are often overlooked by the scientific research community mainly due to their elusive nocturnal behaviour and wide distribution pattern compared to other popular small carnivores in the landscapes (Duckworth et al. 2016a, 2024).

Both species of ferret badgers, i.e., *M. moschata* (Gray, 1831), and *M. personata* (I. Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, 1831) are reported to be native and also extant across Province of China, Cambodia, northeastern India, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Taiwan, Thailand, Viet Nam, and a few uncertain populations in Bhutan (Storz & Wozencraft 1999; Duckworth et al. 2016a,b, 2024). More recent data suggests the presence of *M. personata* from the Himalayan foothills in Nepal as new range extension (Bhatta et al. 2021; Pathak et

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Competing interests: The authors declare no competing interests.

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al. 2022). Till date, from India there are confirmed distribution records of *Melogale* sp. from different parts of the northeastern states such as from the Balpakram National Park, and a village community forest in Meghalaya to East Kameng District of Arunachal Pradesh (Kakati et al. 2014), Dampa Tiger Reserve in Mizoram and community forest in Mokokchung District of Nagaland (Choudhury 2013; Ved & Zathang 2014), Gumti Wildlife Sanctuary, and from the surrounding 'jhum' fields in Tripura (Patil et al. 2025). The assessment of IUCN Red List of Threatened Species categorises both the Burmese Ferret Badger and the Chinese Ferret Badger as 'Least Concern' species with uncertain population size and trend (Duckworth et al. 2016b, 2024). Although categorized as 'Stable' population, the lack of distinct morphological traits makes it difficult to differentiate them in wild without physical examination, thus proving challenges in accurate determination of their actual population status and distribution pattern, home range or habitat usage.

In this study, we present conclusive evidence for the occurrence of the *Melogale* sp. from the community forest of Kamjong District in Manipur India. The study will further aid to its geographic and ecological distribution in southern Asia, particularly in the northeastern states of India where hunting and traditional bushmeat consumption are integral part of the communities which may pose long-term conservation challenges.

MATERIAL & METHODS

Study area

Camera trapping was carried out in Godah Village (23.893° N & 94.343 °E) under Phungyar Sub-division of Kamjong District which was newly created on 08 December 2016. The district shares a long international border with Myanmar in the east and is also bounded by Ukhrul in the north, Imphal-East on the west, and Chandel in the south (Image 1). The terrain of the district is hilly with varying heights of 913–3,114 m. The forest type in the study area is of tropical deciduous forest comprising of a mosaic of forest patches consisting of secondary forest, slash-and-burn fields, and woody shrubs with dominant plant species such as *Dipterocarpus turbinatus*, *Schima wallichii*, *Castanopsis indica*, and bamboo species like *Dendrocalamus strictus* and *Melocanna baccifera*. Kamjong District is mainly inhabited by the Tangkhul Nagas, comprising 94% of the total population with the Kukis comprising 4.59% of the district. The climate of the district is of temperate nature with a minimum and maximum degrees of 3–33 °C.

Methods

The study was a pilot scale approach designed to document the presence of small carnivores in the community forest (4 km²) targeting especially the Chinese Pangolin *Manis pentadactyla* using grid size of 1 × 1 km cells. In the survey, one passive camera-trap

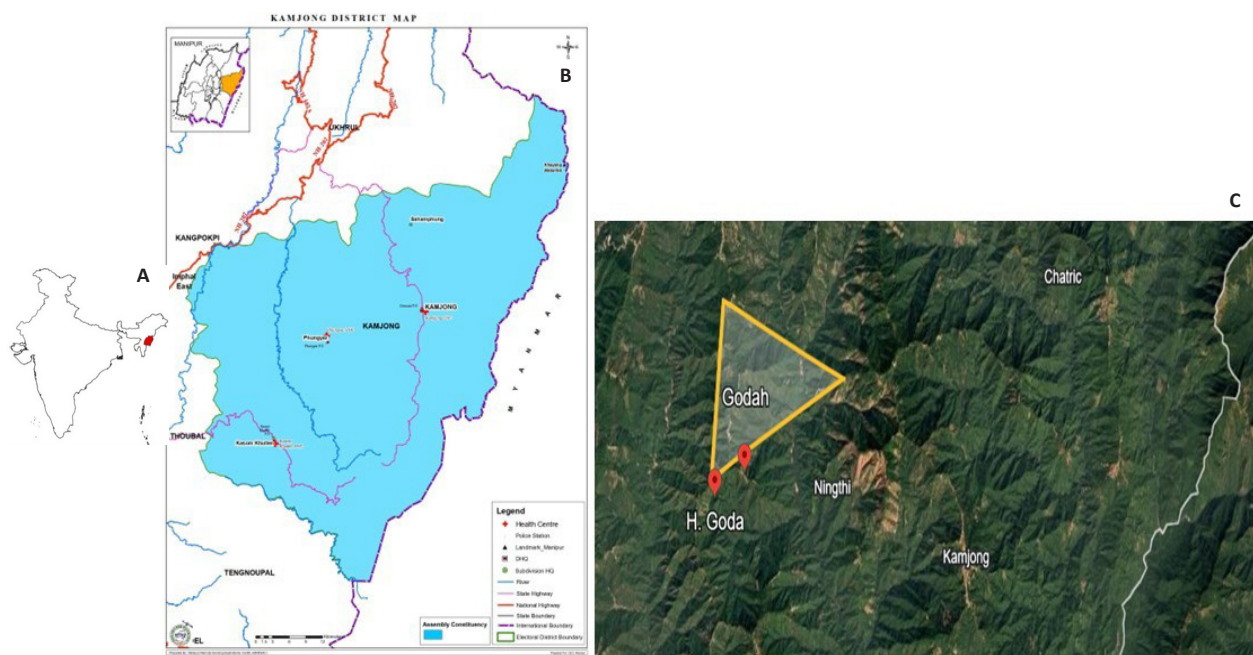


Image 1. Map of the study site showing Godah Village in Kamjong District of Manipur, India. A—India (highlighting Manipur State | B—Kamjong District, Manipur | C—Kodah community forest.

was deployed per grid, camera traps (Model Cuddeback X-Change IR) were installed for a period of 30 days from 02 August to 02 September 2025, along forest trails and other crossing points at appropriate height. Cameras were checked at regular intervals for battery, physical obstacles, and proper functionality.

RESULTS

During the study period, a total of 40 independent images and 38 short-timed videos of ferret badger *Melogale* sp. were recorded from 31 camera-trap nights from the four camera trap locations (Image 1). The images obtained through camera trapping process confirms the presence of *Melogale* sp. from the community forest. It also represents their higher degree of adaptability to degraded forest and anthropogenic pressure. All the images were recorded between 2000 h and 2300 h ascertaining their nocturnal behaviour

and feeding ecology. A pair of ferret badgers were also photographed together during the survey period. The habitat type of the trap locations where the ferret badgers were recorded consists of bamboo brakes and regenerated secondary forest formed upon shifting cultivation (jhum).

DISCUSSION

Increase in wildlife research, modern day tools & techniques, and the reach to different parts of the globe had led to reporting of many of the lesser-known species in wild. *Melogale* sp. which are seldom studied in their natural habitat remains a prime example. While the presence of *Melogale* spp. from Manipur was first reported by Ramakantha (1992), the study herein provides the first camera-trap images of *Melogale* spp. from the state, re-affirming their distribution.

Echoing to previous finding on the habitat use by

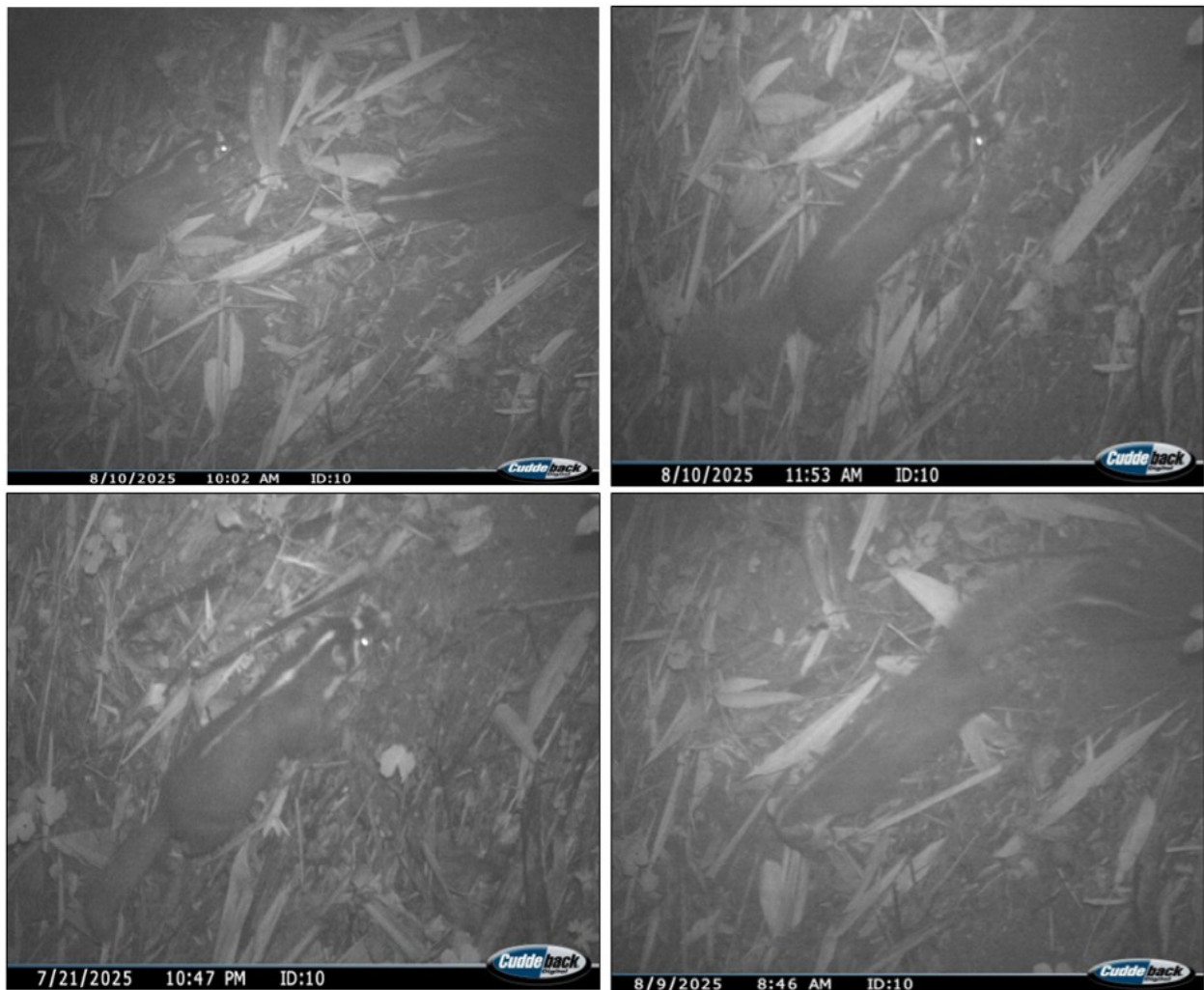


Image 2. Camera trap images of ferret badger on various occasions during the study period.

ferret badger from the northeastern states of India (Kakati et al. 2014; Pathak et al. 2022; Patil et al. 2025), our study also reports the use of secondary forest in the vicinity of the village by ferret badgers. Successful adaptation to human environment and lack of direct conflict with humans can also be attributed to the selection by ferret badgers (Wang & Fuller 2003). The presence of ferret badgers in areas close to humans can often be beneficial as they are known to be frugivorous and endozoochorous seed dispersers. Ferret badgers often support in germination and regeneration of plant species like *Clematoclethra scandens*, *Actinidia chinensis*, *Hovenia dulcis*, and *Dendrobenthamia japonica* (Zhou et al. 2008). While ferret badgers are yet to be listed in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) list; trading and regular consumption of ferret badgers as bushmeat or as live pets particularly in the Indo-Chinese region continues to persist and poses future conservation challenges (Boyd et al. 2003; Shepherd 2012; Thomas et al. 2021). In India, as both species of ferret badgers have been observed with their ranges majorly overlapping across the Asian mainland (Ved & Zathang 2014; Patil et al. 2025), more reporting on ferret badgers and detail studies are needed to affirm their distribution and habitat preference. As differentiation between the small-toothed/Chinese and large-toothed or Burmese Ferret Badger continue to confuse researchers until physical examination of the molar teeth, our study also endorses targeted research programmes and conservation initiatives to conserve these species in the long run.

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