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Cover: Indian Grey Wolf *Canis lupus pallipes* and Smooth-coated Otter *Lutrogale perspicillata* sharing the territory in Chambal basin. Digital art on Procreate by Aakanksha Komanduri.

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Asia, and has been documented from India, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia (Huang et al. 2020). In India, the Painted Bat has been documented from several states Assam, Manipur, Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Sikkim, West Bengal (Madhavan et al. 2014; Patel et al. 2017; Saikia et al. 2020; Huang et al. 2020; Lagade et al. 2023). However, no confirmed records, whether specimen-based or photographic, have been published from Uttar Pradesh, particularly from the ecologically distinct Terai region. Despite supporting diverse mammalian assemblages, chiropteran diversity in the Indian Terai remains inadequately documented, with survey efforts primarily focused on charismatic megafauna. This knowledge gap impedes effective conservation planning and may result in underestimation of regional biodiversity. This study presents the photographic documentation of *Kerivoula picta* from three protected areas in the Terai region of Uttar Pradesh, extending the known distribution of this species northward and emphasizing the need for intensified bat survey efforts in this under-studied landscape.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Area

Field observations were conducted across three protected areas in the Terai region of Uttar Pradesh, northern India: Dudhwa National Park (28.52° N, 80.90° E; 490.3 km²), Kishanpur Wildlife Sanctuary (28.38° N, 80.52° E; 227 km²), and Pilibhit Tiger Reserve (28.70° N, 80.08° E; 730 km²) (Image 1). The Terai Arc Landscape spans approximately 49,500 km² across India and Nepal, forming a globally significant conservation corridor characterized by exceptional habitat heterogeneity and faunal diversity (Chanchani et al. 2014). The vegetation is predominantly moist deciduous forest dominated by *Shorea robusta* (Sal), interspersed with riverine forests along the Suheli, Mohana, and Sharda rivers, extensive grasslands composed of *Saccharum spontaneum*, *Imperata cylindrica*, and *Phragmites karka*, and forest-grassland ecotones providing structural heterogeneity (Champion & Seth 1968). Abandoned forest infrastructure, including disused guard posts (chowkis), creates potential roosting microhabitats for crevice- and foliage-roosting bat species. The region experiences a tropical monsoonal climate characterized by three distinct seasons: hot summer (March–June,

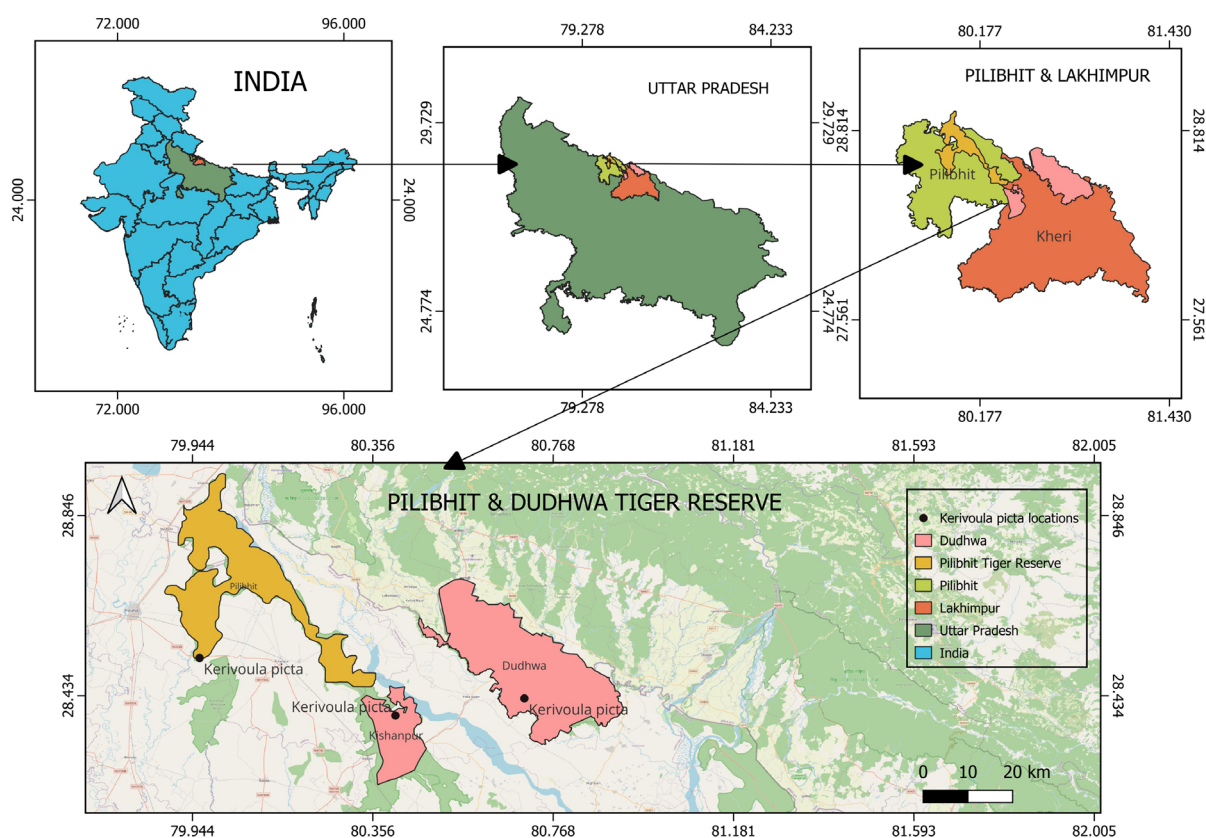


Image 1. Location map of *Kerivoula picta* sighting in Pilibhit & Dudhwa Tiger Reserve, Uttar Pradesh, India. (Source: QGIS Desktop 3.44.3)

temperatures 35–42°C), monsoon (July–September, annual precipitation 1,400–1,800 mm), and cool winter (October–February, temperatures 5–15°C).

Field Observations and Documentation

All observations were obtained opportunistically during routine field activities and wildlife monitoring programs conducted between January 2017 and October 2025. No systematic bat surveys were undertaken; rather, records represent incidental encounters during other conservation work. Individuals were observed without handling or capturing them, and efforts were made to minimize disturbance during documentation. Two individuals were photographed during direct observations through Canon EOS 200D Mark II digital camera equipped with an EF-S 18–55 mm lens, while the third individual was observed in a Cuddeback C1 camera trap with white flash, deployed at ground level (approximately, 30 cm height) along a forest trail for large mammal monitoring. Geographic coordinates of all the three observation sites were recorded using a Garmin eTrex 30x handheld GPS (accuracy ± 3 m). Species identification was based on diagnostic morphological characters visible in the photographs and comparison with published taxonomic literature and identification guides (Bates & Harrison 1998; Francis 2019).

RESULTS

All observed individuals were identified as *Kerivoula picta*, recorded from three protected areas (Dudhwa National Park, Kishanpur Wildlife Sanctuary, and Pilibhit Tiger Reserve) in Uttar Pradesh, representing the photographic evidence of this species from the Terai landscape of Uttar Pradesh (Image 1). The first observation was recorded from Dudhwa National Park in January 2017 (28.42771° N, 80.70275° E), where a single individual was encountered roosting inside an abandoned forest chowki in the Dudhwa Range during a routine patrol (Image 2a). The individual was photographed at the roost without being handled. The bat remained undisturbed during the observation.

The second observation was recorded from Kishanpur Wildlife Sanctuary in October 2024 (28.38861° N, 80.40821° E) (Image 2b), where a single individual of *K. picta* was observed roosting during daylight hours inside an abandoned forest chowki. The site was located within a riverine forest tract characterized by mixed deciduous vegetation. Multiple photographs were obtained, documenting the characteristic orange pelage, black wing membranes, orange pigmentation on the metacarpals, ear shape, tragus morphology,

and overall body form. The individual was not handled, and no apparent disturbance was observed during photographic documentation.

The third record was recorded from Pilibhit Tiger Reserve in October 2025 through an incidental camera-trap photograph (28.520208° N, 79.960553° E) (Image 2c). The most striking feature was the bright orange to reddish-orange pelage covering both dorsal and ventral body surfaces. This vivid coloration was uniformly distributed across the head, neck, torso, and limbs, creating a highly distinctive appearance. The fur texture was notably long, soft, and woolly, imparting a fluffy appearance characteristic of foliage-roosting *Kerivoula* species. Wing membranes (patagia) were uniformly jet-black, providing stark contrast against the brilliant orange body fur. This colour demarcation was sharply defined along the membrane attachment line. Significantly, the orange pigmentation extended along the metacarpals and proximal portions of the wing membranes, forming distinct linear orange streaks visible both in roosting position and when wings were extended. This metacarpal pigmentation pattern represents a key diagnostic trait distinguishing *Kerivoula picta* from sympatric vespertilionids. Ears were proportionally large, distinctly funnel-shaped, and semi-translucent with visible blood vessels. The tragus was narrow, elongated, and sharply pointed, comprising approximately half the ear length. Overall body structure was small and delicate, with a fragile appearance typical of foliage-roosting species.

The combination of bright orange pelage, contrasting black wing membranes, orange metacarpal streaks, large funnel-shaped ears, elongated tragus, and delicate body structure collectively provided a definitive identification. No other bat species occurring in northern India exhibits this distinctive colour pattern and morphology. Given the species' highly diagnostic appearance, photographic documentation alone can be considered sufficient for reliable identification, as established in previous photographic records from other regions (Madhavan et al. 2014; Patel et al. 2017; Saikia et al. 2020).

DISCUSSION

The records presented here significantly expand the documented distribution of *Kerivoula picta* in Terai Arc Landscape of northern India. The absence of records from Uttar Pradesh, particularly the Terai region, represented a conspicuous distributional gap given the species' presence in adjacent regions. Our observations bridge this geographic gap and suggest ecological continuity between the Terai Arc Landscape and other foliage-rich habitats occupied by *Kerivoula picta* elsewhere in India.



Image 2. *Kerivoula picta*: a—in Dudhwa National Park | b—in Kishanpur Wildlife Sanctuary | c—in Pilibhit Tiger Reserve. © Vipin Kapoor Sainy & Rohit Ravi.

The northward range extension documented here raises questions about potential distributional continuity across the Indo-Gangetic Plain and connectivity with populations in the Himalayan foothills. Further surveys in intervening areas, particularly in western Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and neighbouring Nepal, may reveal additional populations and clarify the species' distribution pattern in northern India.

The apparent scarcity of *K. picta* records from Uttar Pradesh likely reflects survey bias rather than genuine rarity. Foliage-roosting bats are notoriously difficult to detect using conventional survey methods (Meyer 2015). In the Terai region, conservation and monitoring efforts in protected areas have largely focused on large mammals such as Tiger, Asian Elephant, Greater One-horned Rhinoceros, and Swamp Deer, with comparatively limited attention to bat diversity. The three records presented here all resulted from incidental

encounters during other activities, not from targeted bat surveys, suggesting that systematic efforts would yield substantially more records.

The habitat contexts of our three records provide insights into the roosting ecology of this species in the Terai region. The species has previously been recorded from a variety of habitats, including dry deciduous forests, dry dipterocarp forests, small woodland patches, floodplains, and agricultural landscapes such as paddy fields, mainly in dried banana leaves, dry grass, and sugarcane, as well as occasionally in green leaves of banana and broadleaf trees, orchards, and mixed plantations (Madhavan et al. 2014; Funakoshi et al. 2015; Hawkeswood & Sommung 2017; Patel et al. 2017). All three records in the present study were obtained from dry deciduous forest habitats. Two individuals were found roosting inside abandoned forest chowkis, while the third individual was recorded along a forest trail. The

occurrence of all three records in dry deciduous forest is consistent with previously reported habitat associations of *K. picta*. The two roosting records also indicate that the species may use abandoned man-made structures as roosting sites. However, further systematic studies are required to determine its roosting-site preferences and habitat requirements in the Terai region. The three records were obtained in January and October, indicating that *K. picta* occurs in the study area during both winter and post-monsoon periods. However, the limited number of observations does not allow conclusions about seasonal movements or residency. Further systematic surveys across seasons are needed to determine the seasonal occurrence, roosting ecology, and habitat use of the species in the Terai region.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study documents three photographic records of *Kerivoula picta* from Dudhwa National Park, Kishanpur Wildlife Sanctuary, and Pilibhit Tiger Reserve in the Terai region of Uttar Pradesh. These observations provide additional distributional evidence for the species and emphasize the value of opportunistic photographic and camera-trap records in documenting bats in the region. Further future studies should be focus on systematic methods, including acoustic monitoring, mist-netting, and roost searches, to document bat diversity and habitat use across different seasons and habitats. Strengthen awareness and capacity of forest department staff and local researchers in bat survey techniques, acoustic analysis, and non-invasive monitoring methods to support long-term monitoring efforts and conservation of bats in the Terai landscape.

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