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RESPONSE

COMMENTS ON THE “A CHECKLIST OF MAMMALS WITH HISTORICAL RECORDS FROM DARJEELING-SIKKIM HIMALAYA LANDSCAPE, INDIA”

P.O. Nameer

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Comments on the “A checklist of mammals with historical records from Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalaya landscape, India”

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I would like to commend Naulak & Pradhan (2020) for their recent publication ‘A checklist of the mammals of Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalaya landscape, India’. The region-specific taxonomic checklists are extremely useful for long-term conservation of biodiversity. I congratulate the authors for their attempt to bring out the publication on the “Checklist of mammals of Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalayas”. However, in their checklist, Naulak & Pradhan (2020) include some doubtful species for which some additional information is solicited, without which their paper does not add any value and, instead, only adds more confusion to the mammalian literature of the Sikkim and Darjeeling region. Therefore, I provide the following comments:

Appendix I, # 122: Fishing Cat, *Prionailurus viverrinus*

The presence of Fishing Cat in Sikkim is doubtful. Naulak & Pradhan (2020) include this species based on two publications (Avasthe & Jha 1999; Srinivasulu & Srinivasulu 2012). However, Srinivasulu & Srinivasulu (2012) does not mention a fishing cat in Sikkim. Details in Avasthe & Jha (1999) could not be verified, but this being a non-peer-reviewed publication, one cannot accept this as the sole reference to validate the presence of a fishing cat in Sikkim.

In India, fishing cats have been recorded from Dudhwa Tiger Reserve and Soor Sarovar Bird Sanctuary in Uttar Pradesh (Mukherjee et al. 2012, 2016), Corbett Tiger Reserve in Uttarakhand, Sundarbans Tiger Reserve in West Bengal, Keoladeo Ghana National Park (Mukherjee

et al. 2012) and Ranthambore Tiger Reserve (Sadhu & Reddy 2013) in Rajasthan, Kaziranga Karbi Anglong Landscape (Mukherjee et al. 2016) and Manas Tiger Reserve (Mukherjee et al. 2016) in Assam, Valmiki Tiger Reserve (Mukherjee et al. 2016) in Bihar, Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary (Mukherjee et al. 2012; Malla & Sivakumar 2014) in Andhra Pradesh and Namdapha Tiger Reserve (Mukherjee et al. 2016) in Arunachal Pradesh. Outside the protected area network, records exist from Pilibhit Forest Division (Mukherjee et al. 2016) in Uttar Pradesh, in small wetland patches in West Bengal near Kolkata, and its suburbs like the Howrah and Hooghly districts (Adhya et al. 2011), in Medinipur and Nadia districts and the human-dominated north-eastern part of Chilika Lake and Tangi district (Mukherjee et al. 2016) in Odisha.

Thus, pertinent literature supporting the presence of a fishing cat in Sikkim is warranted if the record in Naulak & Pradhan (2020) is to be accepted.

Appendix I, # 139. Bengal Fox, *Vulpes bengalensis*

The presence of Bengal Fox from Darjeeling in Naulak & Pradhan (2020) is based on Agrawal et al. (1992), Saha et al. (1992) and Mallick (2012). Of these, Mallick (2012), and Saha et al. (1992), do not record this species from Darjeeling and Agrawal et al. (1992) report are based on a historical reference (Dash 1947). Moreover, Jhala (2016) does not record this species from Darjeeling.

Appendix I, # 143. Brown Bear, *Ursus arctos*

The presence of Brown Bear in Sikkim is based on

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Avasthe & Jha (1999) and Srinivasulu & Srinivasulu (2012). According to Srinivasulu & Srinivasulu (2012), Brown Bear is seen in the Himalayas in India, but there is no specific mention of the presence of Brown Bear in Sikkim. Avasthe & Jha (1999), on the other hand, being a non-peer-reviewed publication, cannot be accepted for establishing the occurrence of a species from a hitherto unreported region. Moreover, McLellan et al. (2017) does not report the species from Sikkim.

Appendix I, # 146. Eurasian Otter, *Lutra lutra*

The Eurasian Otter is included primarily based on either historical or 'grey literature, from both Darjeeling (Dalgilesh 1906; Wroughton 1916a, 1917; Agrawal et al. 1992), as well as Sikkim (Wroughton 1916b; Sanborn 1932; Avasthe & Jha 1999; Chattopadhyay et al. 2006). Chattopadhyay et al. (2006), a recent study, included *Lutra lutra* from Sikkim after Ghose & Biswas (1982), who did not provide any evidence. In this context, the presence of Eurasian Otter in this region cannot be accepted.

Appendix I, # 152. Himalayan Stoat or Ermine, *Mustela erminea*

The Ermine has been claimed to be occurring in Sikkim based on Vijayan et al. (2004) and Lepcha et al. (2017). However, Vijayan et al. (2004) make only a passing reference about the 'sighting' of an ermine from Sikkim, without any further details. Furthermore, neither any notes nor any pictures were provided; while Lepcha et al. (2017) could not be verified, but this being a non-peer-reviewed publication, more evidence are required before this species can be included in the Sikkim mammal list. Moreover, Ermine is known only from the Ladakh region in India to this date (Reid et al. 2016).

Appendix I, # 164. Red Muntjac, *Muntiacus vaginalis*

Though a taxonomic revision was proposed for *Muntiacus muntjac*, splitting the currently known species into three species has not been recognized (Mattioli 2011). Therefore, this species name should be changed to *Muntiacus muntjac*.

Appendix I, # 168. Takin, *Budorcas taxicolor*

A recent taxonomic revision of the Takin has led to two subspecies being elevated to distinct species, the Mishmi Takin *Budorcas taxicolor* and the Bhutan Takin *Budorcas whitei* (Groves & Leslie 2011), and it is the latter species that occurs in Sikkim.

Appendix I, # 172. Argali, *Ovis ammon*

The Altai Argali, *Ovis ammon*, is currently confined to Eastern Russia, Eastern Kazakhstan, Western Mongolia and North-West China (Groves & Leslie 2011), and the species present in India, including Sikkim, is the Tibetan Argali *Ovis hodgsoni*.

The comments and clarifications provided above need to be considered before the checklist of Naulak & Pradhan (2020) is used by biodiversity managers, scientists and interested public. It will also be beneficial if the authors correct the above errors and publish a corrigendum. This will help prevent misleading information to enter the published literature in future. Finally, there are also some errors in the spelling of scientific names (for e.g., *Mustela ermine*), which also need to be thoroughly checked, corrected and updated.

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Communications
Persistence of *Trachypithecus geei* (Mammalia: Primates: Cercopithecidae) in a rubber plantation in Assam, India

– Joydeep Shil, Jihosuo Biswas, Sudipta Nag & Honnavalli N. Kumara, Pp. 18679–18686

Population assessment of the endangered Western Hoolock Gibbon *Hoolock hoolock* Harlan, 1834 at Sheikh Jamal Inani National Park, Bangladesh, and conservation significance of this site for threatened wildlife species

– M. Tarik Kabir, M. Farid Ahsan, Susan M. Cheyne, Shahrul Anuar Mohd Sah, Susan Lappan, Thad Q. Bartlett & Nadine Ruppert, Pp. 18687–18694

Assessment of changes over a decade in the patterns of livestock depredation by the Himalayan Brown Bear in Ladakh, India

– Aishwarya Maheshwari, A. Arun Kumar & Sambandam Sathyakumar, Pp. 18695–18702

Habitat selection of Himalayan Musk Deer *Moschus leucogaster* (Mammalia: Artiodactyla: Moschidae) with respect to biophysical attributes in Annapurna Conservation Area of Nepal

– Bijaya Neupane, Nar Bahadur Chhetri & Bijaya Dhami, Pp. 18703–18712

Sero-diagnosis of tuberculosis in elephants in Maharashtra, India

– Utkarsh Rajhans, Gayatri Wankhede, Balaji Ambore, Sandeep Chaudhari, Navnath Nighot, Vitthal Dhaygude & Chhaya Sonekar, Pp. 18713–18718

Avian species richness in traditional rice ecosystems: a case study from upper Myanmar

– Steven G. Platt, Myo Min Win, Naing Lin, Swann Htet Naing Aung, Ashish John & Thomas R. Rainwater, Pp. 18719–18737

Conservation status, feeding guilds, and diversity of birds in Daroji Sloth Bear Sanctuary, Karnataka, India

– M.N. Harisha, K.S. Abdul Samad & B.B. Hosetti, Pp. 18738–18751

Birds of Surat-Dangs: a consolidated checklist of 75 years (1944–2020) with special emphasis on noteworthy bird records and bird hotspots from northern Western Ghats of Gujarat, India

– Nikunj Jambu & Kaushal G. Patel, Pp. 18752–18780

Identification of a unique barb from the dorsal body contour feathers of the Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura* (Aves: Passeriformes: Pittidae)

– Prateek Dey, Swapna Devi Ray, Sanjeev Kumar Sharma, Padmanabhan Pramod & Ram Pratap Singh, Pp. 18781–18791

Underestimated diversity of *Cnemaspis* Strauch, 1887 (Sauria: Gekkonidae) on karst landscapes in Sarawak, East Malaysia, Borneo

– Izneil Nashriq & Indraneil Das, Pp. 18792–18799

Aborichthys barapensis, a new species of river loach (Cypriniformes: Nemacheilidae) from Arunachal Pradesh, the eastern Himalaya, India

– P. Nanda & L. Tamang, Pp. 18800–18808

A study on the community structure of damselflies (Insecta: Odonata: Zygoptera) in Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal, India

– Pathik Kumar Jana, Priyanka Halder Mallick & Tanmay Bhattacharya, Pp. 18809–18816

New distribution and range extension records of geometrid moths (Lepidoptera: Geometridae) from two western Himalayan protected areas

– Pritha Dey & Axel Hausmann, Pp. 18817–18826

Butterfly diversity of Patalibazar Municipality, Syangja District, Gandaki Province, Nepal

– Kismat Neupane & Mahamad Sayab Miya, Pp. 18827–18845

New records and distribution extension of *Nassarius persicus* (Martens, 1874) and *N. tadjallii* Moolenbeek, 2007 (Mollusca: Gastropoda: Nassariidae) to India

– Sayali Nerurkar & Deepak Apte, Pp. 18846–18852

Flowering plants of Agumbe region, central Western Ghats, Karnataka, India

– G.S. Adithya Rao & Y.L. Krishnamurthy, Pp. 18853–18867

Population assessment and habitat distribution modelling of the threatened medicinal plant *Picrorhiza kurroa* Royle ex Benth. in the Kumaun Himalaya, India

– Naveen Chandra, Gajendra Singh, Shashank Lingwal, M.P.S. Bisht & Lalit Mohan Tewari, Pp. 18868–18877

Occurrence of gilled fungi in Puducherry, India

– Vadivelu Kumaresan, Chakravarthy Sarhi, Thokur Sreepathy Murali & Gunasekaran Senthilarasu, Pp. 18878–18887

Short Communications
First photographic evidence and distribution of the Indian Pangolin *Manis crassicaudata* (Mammalia: Pholidota: Manidae) in Sariska Tiger Reserve, Rajasthan, India

– Hemant Singh, Gobind Sagar Bhardwaj, N. Gokulakannan, Saket Agasti & K. Aditya, Pp. 18888–18893

Population and conservation threats to the Greater Flamingos *Phoenicopterus roseus* (Aves: Phoenicopteriformes: Phoenicopteridae) at Basai Wetland and Najafgarh Jheel Bird Sanctuary, Haryana, India

– Amit Kumar & Sarita Rana, Pp. 18894–18898

First report on the occurrence of Sargassum Weed Fish *Histrio histrio* (Lophiiformes: Antennariidae) in Nigeria deep water, Gulf of Guinea

– Abdul-Rahman Dirisu, Hanson S. Uyi & Meshack Uyi, Pp. 18899–18902

A new distribution record of stomatopods *Odontodactylus japonicus* (De Haan, 1844) and *Lysiosquilla tredecimdentata* (Holthuis, 1941) from the Puducherry coastal waters, east coast of India

– S. Nithya Mary, V. Ravitchandiran & B. Gunalan, Pp. 18903–18907

New records of *Agriocnemis keralensis* Peters, 1981 and *Gynacantha khasiaca* MacLachlan, 1896 (Insecta: Odonata) from Maharashtra, India

– Yogesh Koli, Akshay Dalvi & Dattaprasad Sawant, Pp. 18908–18912

A new distribution record of the Horn Coral *Caryophyllia grandis* Gardiner & Waugh, 1938 (Anthozoa: Scleractinia) from the Karnataka Coast, India

– J.S. Yogesh Kumar & C. Raghunathan, Pp. 18920–18924

Re-collection, extended distribution, and amplified description of *Vaccinium paucicrenatum* Sleumer (Ericaceae) from the Arunachal Himalaya in India

– Subhasis Panda, Pp. 18925–18932

Notes
Photographic record of the Rusty-spotted Cat *Prionailurus rubiginosus* (I. Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, 1831) (Mammalia: Carnivora: Felidae) in southern Western Ghats, India

– Devika Sanghamitra & P.O. Nameer, Pp. 18933–18935

Natural history notes on the highly threatened Pinto's Chachalaca *Ortalis remota* (Aves: Cracidae)

– Carlos Otávio Araújo Gussoni & Marco Aurélio Galvão da Silva, Pp. 18936–18938

Black-bellied Coral Snake *Sinomicrurus nigricinctus* (Wall, 1908) (Elapidae): an extended distribution in the western Himalaya, India

– Sipu Kumar, Jignasu Dolia, Vartika Chaudhary, Amit Kumar & Abhijit Das, Pp. 18939–18942

First record of the Afghan Poplar Hawkmoth *Laothoe witti* Eitschberger et al., 1998 (Sphingidae: Smerinthinae) from India: a notable range extension for the genus

– Muzafar Riyaz, Pratheesh Mathew, Taslima Shiekh, S. Ignacimuthu & K. Sivasankaran, Pp. 18943–18946

The tribe Cnoidaloniini (Coleoptera: Tenebrionidae: Stenochiinae) from Maharashtra with two new records

– V.D. Hegde & D. Vasanthakumar, Pp. 18947–18948

Do predatory adult odonates estimate their adult prey odonates' body size and dispersal ability to proceed with a successful attack?

– Tharaka Sudesh Priyadarshana, Pp. 18949–18952

Rediscovery of *Ophiorrhiza incarnata* C.E.C. Fisch. (Rubiaceae) from the Western Ghats of India after a lapse of 83 years

– Perumal Murugan, Vellingiri Ravichandran & Chidambaram Murugan, Pp. 18953–18955

Response
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