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No. 12, Thiruvannamalai Nagar, Saravanampatti - Kalapatti Road, Saravanampatti,
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Ph: +91 9385339863 | www.threatenedtaxa.org

Email: sanjay@threatenedtaxa.org

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Caption: Malabar Slender Loris *Loris lydekkerianus malabaricus* © Dileep Anthikkad.



First record of Spotted Linsang *Prionodon pardicolor* (Mammalia: Carnivora: Prionodontidae) with photographic evidence in Meghalaya, India

Papori Khatonier¹ & Adrian Wansaindor Lyngdoh²

¹Loris in the Abode of Clouds Project, House no. 98, Milantirtha, Rupai Siding, DoomDooma, Tinsukia District, Assam 786153, India.

²Loris in the Abode of Clouds project, House no. 15, Lumkshaid West, Shillong, East Khasi Hills District, Meghalaya 793002, India.

¹parikhatonier@gmail.com (corresponding author), ²adrian.lyngdoh@gmail.com

Abbreviations: CITES—Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (Appendix I, II and III) | IUCN—International Union for Conservation of Nature | RF—Reserved Forest | WS—Wildlife Sanctuary.

The Spotted Linsang *Prionodon pardicolor* is distributed from central Nepal, Bhutan, northeastern India, and southern China to the northern Sundaic region (Van Rompaey 1995; Jennings & Veron 2015; Duckworth et al. 2016). It is listed under Appendix I of CITES and as 'Least Concern' on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (Duckworth et al. 2016). In India, it is accorded the highest protection under Schedule I of the Indian Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.

Previously placed in the civet family (Viverridae), the Spotted Linsang is now under a new monogeneric family, Prionodontidae – a sister group of the family Felidae, from which it is estimated to have diverged about 33

million years ago (Gaubert & Veron 2003). Its size ranges between 31–45 cm and weight between 0.55–1.2 kg (Hunter 2020). It is characterized by a pointed muzzle, an elongated neck and head, a slender body, short limbs, and a tail that is as long as its head and body, between 30–40 cm. It also exhibits cat-like characteristics such as retractile claws. It has a fulvous coat, with large black spots on its dorsal side that extend from the shoulder to its posterior and decrease in size as they approach the ventral side. The long cylindrical tail is also covered by eight to ten broad dark rings, separated by paler rings (Hodgson 1847; Blanford 1888–91; Van Rompaey 1995).

In India, the current distribution of the Spotted Linsang is limited to the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Sikkim, and northern Bengal (Duckworth et al. 2016). But few authors have also mentioned that there is a high probability of its distribution in Meghalaya (Choudhury 2013; Jennings & Veron 2014).

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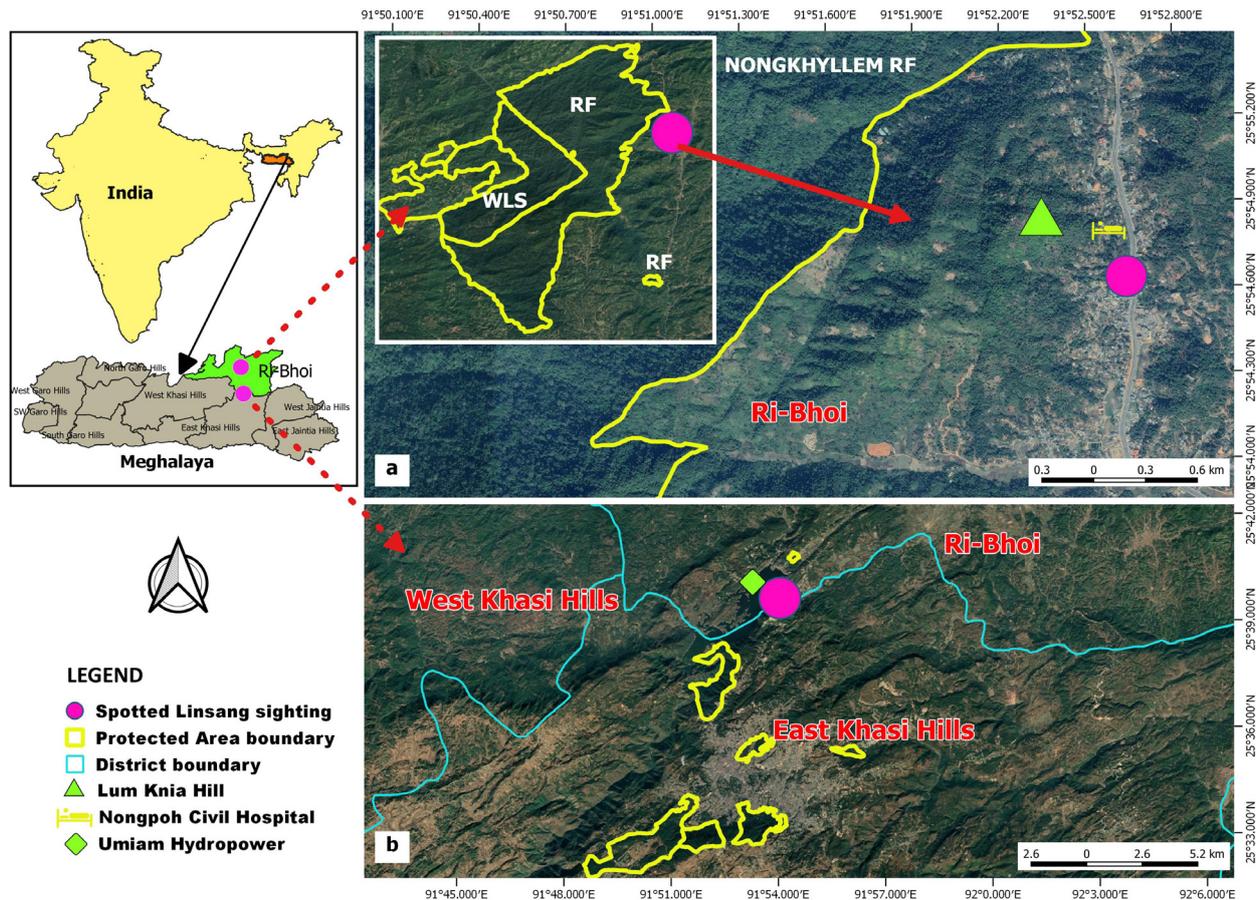


Figure 1. Map showing the two sighting locations of Spotted Linsang in Ri-Bhoi District.

In this paper, we report the first record of Spotted Linsang in the state of Meghalaya with photographic evidence, which extends the known distribution range of this species.

On 29 October 2019, at around 0400h, a Spotted Linsang (Image 1) was found by a hospital staff worker, Wanphai Lyngdoh straying inside the compound of Nongpoh Civil Hospital, Nongpoh Town, Ri-Bhoi district, Meghalaya, India (485m; 25.911°N, 91.878°E) (Figure 1a). It was rescued by the forest department later in the day and released back to Lailad Salt Lick area of Nongkhyllem Wildlife Sanctuary (located approx. 6 km from Nongpoh town; 250m; 26.037°N, 91.867°E) at 1700h. Again, on 4 November 2019, one more individual was rescued from Nongpoh Civil hospital compound around 1630h. It was released on the very same day in Nongkhyllem WS (Lailad Salt Lick area).

Furthermore, in the same area, one resident of Pahamsyiem village near Nongpoh town reported sighting of the Spotted Linsang on a number of occasions, around five years ago, in ‘Lum Knia’ hill. When shown the photo of the Spotted Linsang, Leopard Cat and Small Indian

Civet, from “Mammals of India” (by Grewal & Chakravarty 2017), he insisted that it was the Spotted Linsang that he had sighted (Goson Sangma, pers. comm.).

This area which includes the wildlife sanctuary, Umsaw Reserved Forest, Nongkhyllem RF and patches of unclassified (community owned) forests are mostly characterized by tropical Moist Deciduous forest, with patches of tropical Semi-evergreen forest along rivers. There are also large bamboo patches in old Jhum areas and scattered grasses in depressions and plantations dominated by *Shorea robusta* and *Tectona grandis* (Choudhury 1998).

Another encounter in the state was in 1997, in Ri-Bhoi district, when a forest official sighted one Spotted Linsang near the Hydropower Dam of Umiyam Lake (25.660°N, 91.901°E) crossing the National Highway 40 at dusk (P. Doonai, pers. comm. 2020) (Figure 1b). The highway intersects a patch of unclassified forests, which is contiguous with the Riat Khwan RF. The area experiences a subtropical climate. The vegetation of the Riat Khwan RF and the adjoining forests is mostly subtropical broadleaf hill forests, with the presence of Khasi Pine *Pinus kesiya*



Image 1. Spotted Linsang *Prionodon pardicolor* kept in a cage after being rescued from Nongpoh Civil Hospital, Nongpoh Town, Ri-Bhoi district, Meghalaya, India.

towards higher elevation (Lahkar 2002).

This current record of the Spotted Linsang is in a habitat similar to the habitat types where the species had previously been recorded (Pham-Chong-Ahn 1980; Sunquist 1982; Choudhury 2002; Borah 2010; Ghose et al. 2012; Naniwadekar et al. 2013).

Among the handful of records of the Spotted Linsang in India, it was never reported before from the state of Meghalaya (Lyngdoh et al. 2019). The only mention about the species in Meghalaya was from an unpublished social survey report in south Garo Hills where the respondent stated that the animal had caused damage to domestic livestock (Samrakshan Trust 2008).

The Spotted Linsang is mainly threatened by habitat loss caused by deforestation and conversion to agriculture, such as Jhum and terrace farming (Choudhury 2002; Jennings & Veron 2015).

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