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Srivari Illam, No. 61, Karthik Nagar, 10th Street, Saravanampatty, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu 641006, India
Registered Office: 3A2 Varadarajulu Nagar, FCI Road, Ganapathy, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu 641006, India
Ph: +91 9385339863 | www.threatenedtaxa.org
Email: sanjay@threatenedtaxa.org

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continued on the back inside cover

Cover: Mixed media with fine liners, colour pencils, and watercolour background of an Indian funnel web spider. © Elakshi Mahika Molur.



First photographic evidence of the Chinese Pangolin *Manis pentadactyla* (Linnaeus, 1758) in Raimona National Park, Assam, India

Dipankar Lahkar¹ , M. Firoz Ahmed² , Bhanu Sinha³ , Pranjal Talukdar⁴ , Biswajit Basumatary⁵ ,
Tunu Basumatary⁶ , Ramie H. Begum⁷ , Nibir Medhi⁸ , Nitul Kalita⁹ & Abishek Harihar¹⁰

^{1,2,8,9} Aaranyak, 13, Tayab Ali Bi-lane, Bishnu Rabha Path, Guwahati, Assam 781028, India.

^{3,4,5} Kachugaon Forest Division, Forest Department of Assam, Government of Assam, Assam 783350, India.

⁶ Green Forest Conservation, Kachugaon, Bodoland Territorial Council, Assam 783360, India.

⁷ Department of Life Science and Bioinformatics, Assam University (Diphu campus), Diphu, Karbi Anglong, Assam 782462, India.

¹⁰ Panthera, 8 West 40th Street, 18th Floor, New York, NY 10018, USA.

¹⁰ Nature Conservation Foundation, 1311, “Amritha”, 12th Main, Vijayanagar 1st Stage, Mysore, Karnataka 570017, India.

¹ dipankar.lahkar@gmail.com (corresponding author), ² mfa.aaranyak@gmail.com, ³ sinhafor@gmail.com, ⁴ talukdar.pranjal@gmail.com,

⁵ biswajitbasumatary312@gmail.com, ⁶ tunubasu7@gmail.com, ⁷ ani.ara73@gmail.com, ⁸ nibirmedhi03@gmail.com,

⁹ nitulkalita10@gmail.com, ¹⁰ harihar.abishek@gmail.com

Chinese Pangolin *Manis pentadactyla* is a highly trafficked, elusive, solitary, nocturnal, burrowing mammal with scarce information on its distribution and current occurrence across its distributed range (Heinrich et al. 2017). Two species of pangolins—Indian Pangolin *Manis crassicaudata* and Chinese Pangolin—occur in India (D’Cruze et al. 2018). Considering the high extinction risks due to low population level and extensive hunting and poaching for illegal trafficking, the Chinese Pangolin was listed in Appendix-I of CITES (Anonymous 2022), as ‘Critically Endangered’ in the IUCN Red List (Challender et al. 2019) and in Schedule-I

of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (Anonymous 2024). In India, despite stringent legal protections, pangolins are continuously hunted for meat, body parts and traditional medicinal purposes (Mitra 1998; Mohapatra et al. 2015). Although the global population of Chinese Pangolin is unknown, it is certainly declining, and the prevailing threats are anticipated to contribute to a rapid population loss along its distributional ranges (Challender et al. 2019).

Chinese Pangolin currently occurs in eastern, northern and southeastern Asian countries, spanning India, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar, Thailand,

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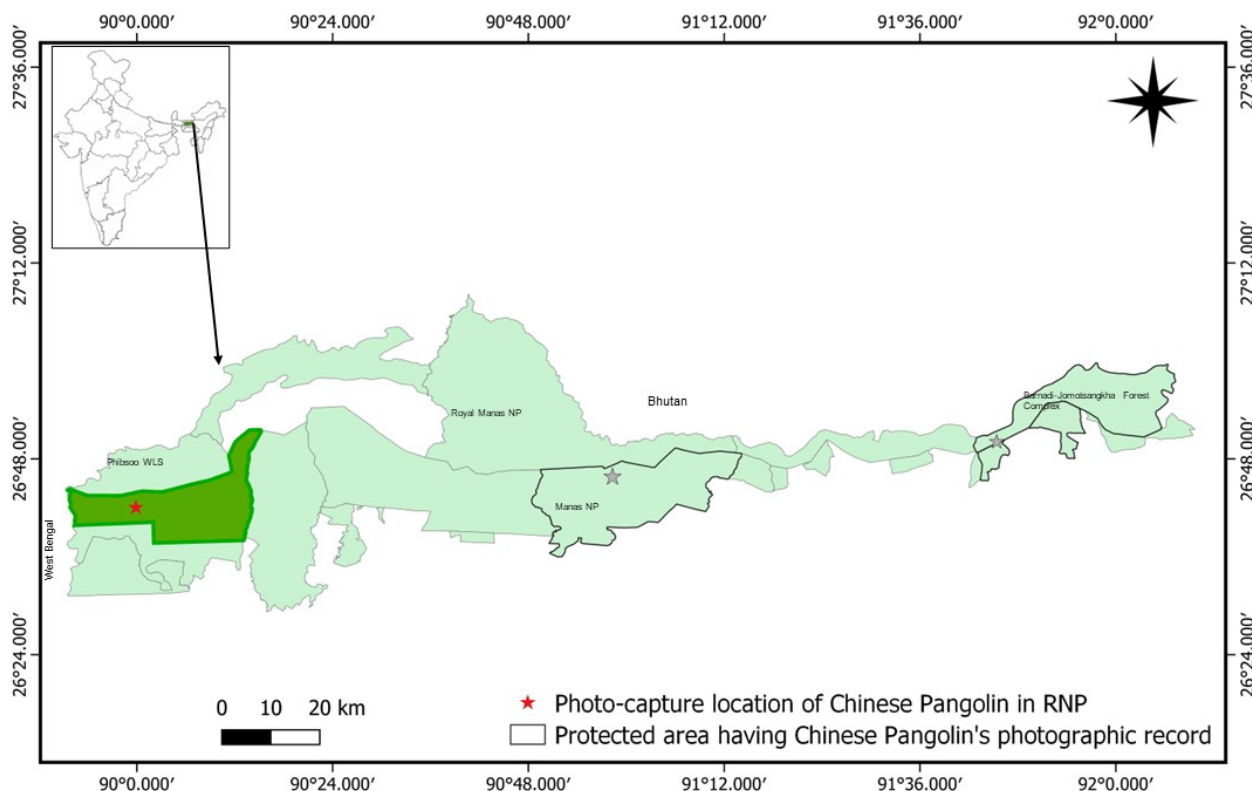


Figure 1. The map of the Transboundary Manas Conservation Area (TramCA), depicts Raimona National Park in deep green fill, with the red star indicating the first photo-captured location of the Chinese Pangolin and the grey stars indicating past photo-captured locations in the TramCA.

China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Lao PDR, and Vietnam at elevations of 0–3,000 m (Challender et al. 2019). In India, the Chinese Pangolin is restricted to the foothills of the Himalaya, in the northern and across the northeastern region. The confirmed photo-capture records of Chinese Pangolin are from Valmiki Tiger Reserve of Bihar (Maurya et al. 2018), Neora Valley National Park of West Bengal (Mallick 2010), Kamlang Tiger Reserve (Jhala et al. 2020), and Pakke Tiger Reserve (Chandan Ri pers. comm. 08.iv.2024) of Arunachal Pradesh and Dampa Tiger Reserve (Sethy et al. 2021) of Mizoram. In Assam, apart from the sporadic media records of rescue, which source of the specimens is largely unknown leading to uncertain distributional predictions, whereas in situ camera-trapped records of Chinese Pangolin are extremely limited. Camera trapped record of Chinese Pangolin in Assam was documented at Manas National Park (Lahkar et al. 2018), Indo-Bhutan Barnadi-Jomotsangkha Forest Complex (Ahmed et al. 2019), and Dibru- Saikhowa National Park (Choudhury 1998). It is worth mentioning that some of the occurrences of Indian Pangolin from northeastern India are mere misidentifications of Chinese Pangolin as the species has not been recorded from the wild with certainty.

Similarly, one of the records from Nagaon, Assam is based on a rescued animal, which perhaps, originated from illegal trade, although details are not available (Anwaruddin Choudhury pers. comm. 08.iv.2024)

Raimona National Park (RNP) is located along the foothills of the Himalaya and is contiguous with the Phibsoo Wildlife Sanctuary of Bhutan, the westernmost protected area within the India-Bhutan Transboundary Manas Conservation Area (6,500 km²) (Figure 1). RNP is considered an important protected area in the complex that connects the forested areas of northern West Bengal, Bhutan, and Manas Tiger Reserve to the west, north, & east, respectively. RNP is a new protected area, established in 2021 with a total area of 422 km², under the administration of Kachugaon division, Bodoland Territorial Region, Assam. The area has had a long history of ethno-political conflicts, which have potentially affected the conservation mechanism.

Since 2019, the RNP authority, in collaboration with Aaranyak, has been conducting systematic annual camera trapping surveys to assess and monitor species assemblages and populations of terrestrial mammals. During the systematic surveys, with the camera trapping efforts of 1,470 trap-days in 2022, three independent



Image 1. A,B—Two independent photo-capture events of Chinese Pangolin *Manis pentadactyla* recorded on 30 January 2022 | C—28 February 2022 at an elevation of 166 m in the Raimona National Park, BTR, Assam, India.

photo-capture of the Chinese Pangolin were obtained from the semi-evergreen forest on 30 January 2022 at 1213 h and 0239 h, and one more on 28 February 2022 at 0412 h from the Ranganadi area under the western range (Raimona) of the RNP (Images 1 & 2).



Indian Pangolin

- Tail is long, thick, and dorsally flat.
- Face small and tubular mouth.
- Ear notch is not distinct.
- Scales are large and brown.



Chinese Pangolin

- Tail is relatively narrow and slender and the tip is necked.
- Face colour is clearer.
- Ear notch is visible.
- Scales are smaller and more greyish.

Image 2. Basic photographic identification description between Indian Pangolin (A) and Chinese Pangolin (B).

The photograph was captured on a dry stream that joins with the river Ranganadi, covered with semi-deciduous forest dominated by Sal Trees *Shorea robusta*. The surface around the camera station was primarily blanketed by small to medium stones covered by the dry leaf litters. This is the first confirmed photographic evidence of the Chinese Pangolin in the RNP.

Chinese Pangolins were formerly distributed across protected and unprotected areas of Assam (Anwaruddin Choudhury pers. comm. 08.iv.2024). The species is now extremely rare and threatened across the region because of hunting and poaching to cater to the international illegal trade. The present photographic evidence of the Chinese Pangolin at the junction of the Indian states of West Bengal, Assam and Bhutan foothills

presents critical evidence of its current occurrence in the region.

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Erratum

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Correct legend of Figure 1 on page 26036 is:

Figure 1. Distribution of *Impatiens devendrae*: a—Map of India | b—Ramban District, Jammu & Kashmir | c—Collection site.

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 c/o Wildlife Information Liaison Development Society,
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 Tamil Nadu 641006, India
 ravi@threatenedtaxa.org & ravi@zooreach.org



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Articles

Endemicity and diversity of birds of the Kuvempu University Campus, Shivamogga District, Karnataka: an updated checklist
– M.N. Harisha & B.B. Hosetti, Pp. 26063–26077

Unregulated wild orchid trade in Manipur: an analysis of the Imphal Valley markets from the Indo-Burma hotspot
– Kamei Kambuikhonlu Kabuini & Maibam Dhanaraj Meitei, Pp. 26078–26088

Watershed survey of streams in western Bhutan with macroinvertebrates, water chemistry, bacteria and DNA barcodes
– Juliann M. Battle, Bernard W. Sweeney, Bryan Currinder, Anthony Aufdenkampe, Beth A. Fisher & Naimul Islam, Pp. 26089–26103

Communications

Indian Leopard predation on the sub-adult Himalayan Griffon Vulture (Accipitridae: Accipitriformes)
– Soumya Sundar Chakraborty, Debal Ray, Apurba Sen, P.J. Hari Krishnan, Nabi Kanta Jha & Rounaq Ghosh, Pp. 26104–26109

Diet composition and diet choice of Lesser Mouse-tailed Bat *Rhinopoma hardwickii* (Gray, 1831) (Rhinopomatidae: Chiroptera)
– Pawan Kumar Misra, Sayma Farheen, Shaktivardhan Singh & Vadmalai Elangovan, Pp. 26110–26115

DNA barcoding and distribution of *Osteobrama peninsularis* (Teleostei: Cyprinidae) in India
– Boni Amin Laskar, Asha Kiran Tudu, Shibananda Rath & Laishram Kosygin, Pp. 26116–26123

Diving into diversity: aquatic beetles of Sukhna Wildlife Sanctuary, Chandigarh, India
– Karmannye Om Chaudhary, Pp. 26124–26130

Review

An updated checklist of snakes (Reptilia: Squamata) in northeastern India derived from a review of recent literature
– Bijay Basfore, Manab Jyoti Kalita, Narayan Sharma & Ananda Ram Boro, Pp. 26131–26149

Viewpoint

Decades of IUCN recommendations for biocontrol of invasive pest on the Guam cycad: you can lead policy-makers to conservation proposals but you cannot make them follow

– Thomas E. Marler, Anders J. Lindström, L. Irene Terry & Benjamin E. Deloso, Pp. 26150–26162

Short Communications

Photographic record of Kashmir Gliding Squirrel *Eoglaucomys fimbriatus* (J.E. Gray, 1837) from the Gurez Valley, Jammu & Kashmir, India

– G. Mustufa Lone, Bilal A. Bhat, Mir Shabir Hussain & Arif Nabi Lone, Pp. 26163–26166

Winter population of raptor species in the Vellalore dump yard of Coimbatore City, India

– V. Balaji & R. Venkitachalam, Pp. 26167–26171

Notes

Phenotypic variations in Mindoro Warty Pig *Sus oliveri* (Cetartiodactyla: Suidae)

– John Carlo Redefia-Santos, Anna Pauline O. de Guia, Nikki Heherson A. Dagamac & Fernando García Gil, Pp. 26172–26175

First photographic evidence of the Chinese Pangolin *Manis pentadactyla* (Linnaeus, 1758) in Raimona National Park, Assam, India

– Dipankar Lahkar, M. Firoz Ahmed, Bhanu Sinha, Pranjal Talukdar, Biswajit Basumatary, Tunu Basumatary, Ramie H. Begum, Nibir Medhi, Nitul Kalita & Abishek Harihar, Pp. 26176–26179

***Habenaria spencei* (Orchidaceae): rediscovery other than its type locality and new distribution record to Karnataka, India**
– Shreyas Betageri & Katrahalli Kotresha, Pp. 26180–26184

Book Review

Fairies of the day and angels of the night
– Chitra Narayanasami, Pp. 26185–26186

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