



CHINESE PANGOLIN

Sighting of Chinese Pangolin (*Manis pentadactyla*) in Valmiki Tiger Reserve, Bihar, India



Rescued specimen of Chinese Pangolin (*Manis Pentadactyla*) in Valmiki Tiger Reserve, Bihar, India (Photo: Valmiki Tiger Reserve Staff)

IUCN Red List:
Critically
Endangered
(Challender et al.,
2014)

Mammalia
[Class of Mammals]

Pholidota
[Order of scaly anteaters]

Manidae
[Family of Pangolin]

Manis pentadactyla
[Chinese Pangolin]

Species described by
Linnaeus in 1758

Chinese pangolin is native to the north and north eastern States of India, including Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Sikkim and also occurs in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar, China, Lao PDR, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam (Kaspal 2008; Gopi et. al., 2012; Challender et al., 2014; Thapa 2014).

This species was reported in the 1980s as common in its distributional range in India (Tikader 1983), its population is rapidly declining in its range due to habitat loss and rampant poaching for its skin, scales and meat (Challender et al., 2011; Nijman et al., 2016).

Present record of Chinese pangolin arises from Valmiki



Tiger Reserve (VTR) (27°10' 0.12" to 27°30'0.00" N; 83°49'59.8" to 84°10'0.00" E; area 901 km²). VTR is located in West Champaran district of Bihar, India and adjacent to NE Nepal. It is contiguous with Nepal's Chitwan National Park in the north and Sohagibarwa Wildlife Sanctuary, Uttar Pradesh in the west. It represents one of the last patches of forests having the unique combination of terai-bhabar vegetation. VTR is dominated by dense sal and mixed deciduous forests (81%), open forest (6.4%), scrubland (3.5%), riverbed and waterbodies (4%), grassland (5.15%) and swampy habitat (0.1%) (Wildlife Trust of India 2012). There are ~26 villages with a population of about 22000 of local tribes and other communities, surrounding the core area.

Global Distribution:

Native: Bhutan, China, Hong Kong, India, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Nepal, Taiwan, Province of China, Thailand, Viet Nam

In the present case, a Chinese pangolin was encountered in eastern most part



Habitat of Valmiki Tiger Reserve in the Himalayan Foothill
(Photo: Kamlesh K. Maurya/WWF India)

of VTR, in the possession of with a farmer in Kotwa village (27°12'12.2"N & 084°39'46.7"E) in Manguraha Range of VTR on 25 June 2015. The specimen was approximately 4-5 kg in body weight. Locally the species is known as "*Saal Machali*" and "*Bajar keet*". According to farmer and frontline staffs of Manguraha Range, the exact location of capture was an agriculture field nearby Jamuniha forest patch, nearly 2km from main

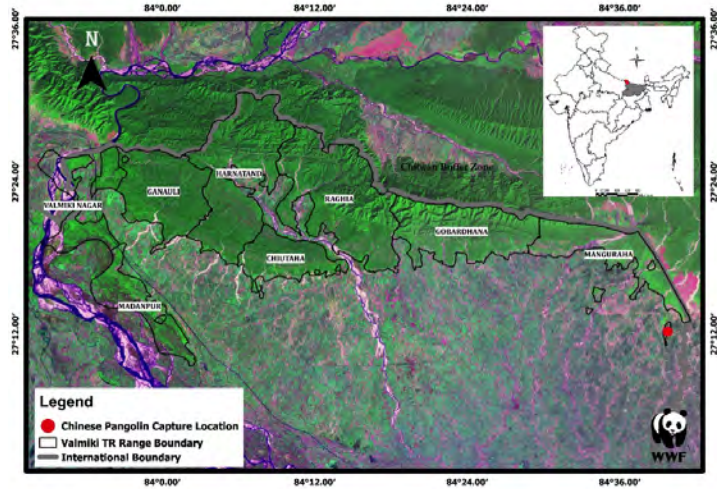
forest. The major land use land cover type in and around Kotwa village is agriculture field, scrub forest and riverine habitats. Some of the villagers were even familiar with the species presence in that area (pers.comm). Interestingly, while VTR has intensively been surveyed with camera traps three time since 2012, neither Chinese nor Indian pangolins was photo captured during three consecutive camera trapping between 2013 and 2017 (Maurya & Borah 2014). However, there have been some record of this species in eastern Nepal and emphasized poaching and habitat destruction as prime factors for the decline of pangolins (Thapa 2014).

It was difficult to establish whether pangolin was captured for meat purposes or trade purpose. The farmer himself inform about pangolin presence to forest officials of Manguraha Range of VTR. Later the animal was released back into forest of Manguraha



range. During releasing, we observed that pangolin uses their front legs for digging the burrow. The soil was pushed backward under their bodies and move it to the burrows entrance using both front and hind legs.

Local knowledge about species observed is an important source of collating information on species distribution and threats, especially for low density and secretive animals (Turvey et al., 2015). Forest front-line staff belonging to local community were able to recognize the species and also provided some morphological descriptions when



Capture location of Chinese Pangolin in Valmiki Tiger Reserve, Bihar

pangolin photograph was shown to them. Very few were able to distinguish between Chinese & Indian pangolin, and claimed to have seen a pangolin inside forest. Front-line staff of Raghia range has claimed that a pangolin was killed by either tiger or leopard near a water stream in 2013 & 2014. In Nov 2013, two 8-9 months old tiger cubs killed a



Manis sp. scale was photographed in village nearby Valmiki Tiger Reserve (Photo: Kamlesh K. Maurya/WWF India)

pangolin near a water hole in Manguraha Range. Pangolin was not eaten by the cubs. In 2015, Forest Department and Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) seized some scales of *Manis* sp along with other wildlife parts in Manguraha Range indicating evidence of trade links between India and Nepal. The source of *Manis* sp scales was not clear.

Local community especially *tharu* & *urano* revealed that pangolins are used for meat and medicinal purposes may be causing localized declines. Sighting of Chinese pangolin and survey confirmed the distribution of species in and around VTR. Further studies on population status and habitat ecology as well as traditional knowledge of the species may be useful to formulate effective conservation strategies in the future.



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