



#252
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Indian Black Turtle in northeastern India with a new record from Assam

The Indian Black Turtle *Melanochelys trijuga* (Schweigger, 1812) is a very rare Geoemydidae turtle in northeastern India. Globally, its known range is from Sri Lanka, Maldives, peninsular India to Himalayan foothills, northeastern India, and Myanmar in the east (Ahmed et al. 2020). Of the four subspecies found within Indian limits, only one occurs in the eastern part of the country, i.e., *indopeninsularis*. Tikader & Sharma (1985) mentioned Jalpaiguri District, West Bengal as its easternmost range in India. They did not report it from anywhere in Assam or other neighbouring states.

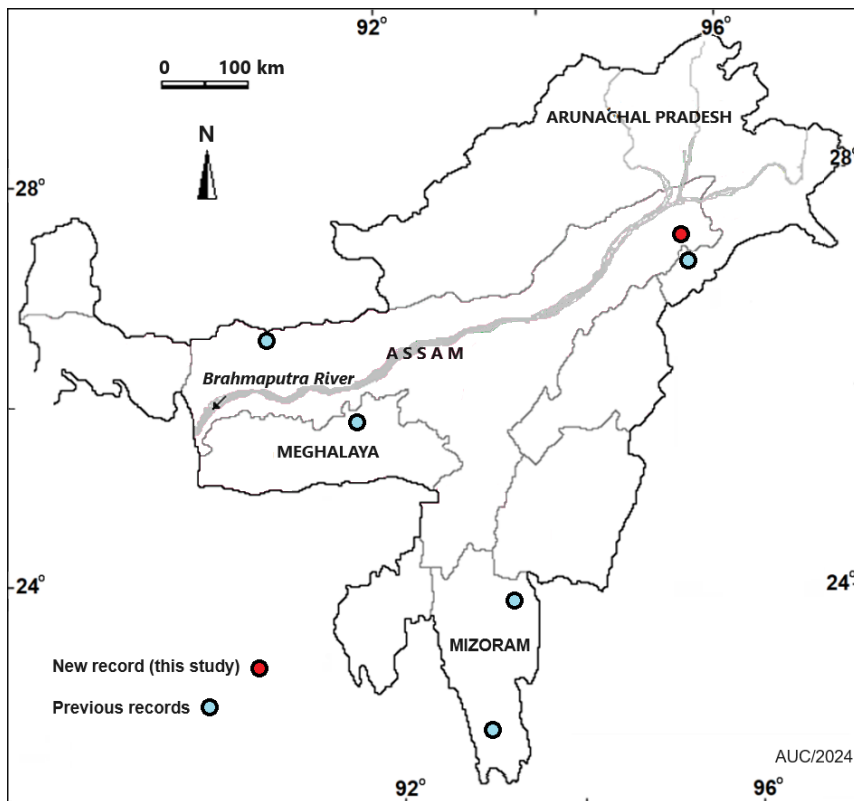
In northeastern India, the records are few and far between. In Arunachal Pradesh it has been recorded in just



Indian Black Turtle *Melanochelys trijuga* (ssp. *indopeninsularis*) near Dihing-Patkai National Park, Assam (2021). © Anwaruddin Choudhury.

one locality, from Hukanjuri, near Namsang in Tirap District in 1993 (Choudhury 2024). In Meghalaya also it has been recorded at one site - from near Lailad Village, Nongkhylllem Wildlife Sanctuary (Das 1990). In Mizoram, it has been recorded

in Ngopa Town (1100 m), which was obtained from Tuivai River (450 m), Champhai District (Choudhury 2004); and in Pawizawh Lui, Zawhlet Lui and Khuangpui Lui of northern part of Nengpui Wildlife Sanctuary (Pawar & Choudhury 2000). In Assam, the only known



Map of northeastern India showing the locations of Indian Black Turtle *Melanochelys trijuga* (ssp. *indopeninsularis*).

area of occurrence is in the western part of the state in Manas Tiger Reserve (Das 1990; Ahmed & Das 2010). Pawar & Birand (2001) had reported it from Nameri-Pakke but did not specify whether it was located in Assam (Nameri) or Arunachal Pradesh (Pakke or Pakhui). Purkayastha et al. (2015) have also shown the same area in their range map. The present account describes reporting of a live turtle photographed and several others observed in Dihing-Patkai landscape of far eastern Assam. The location is inside Upper Dihing (west

block) Reserved Forest, just outside Dihing-Patkai National Park in Tinsukia District (27.326 N, 95.489 E). The first observation and distant photos were obtained while studying the White-winged Wood Duck *Asarcornis scutulata* in two jungle pools inside dense rain forest in 1992–1994. In fact, on several occasions the ducks and turtles were seen resting together on fallen logs. However, the identification of the turtles remained tentative as *Melanochelys trijuga* and at least one more species was also there.

On 25 December 2021, a turtle was photographed and observed closely in one of the pools and was identified to be the Indian Black Turtle. It had elevated and elongated carapace with three keels. Carapace was dark brown. Its identification was further confirmed by expert (Abhijit Das pers. comm. 25.xii.2021). It appears that it is the only record in Assam outside Manas and first from eastern or upper Assam. The only known locality in Arunachal Pradesh is nearer to it. This new locality has added one to the existing few known sites in northeastern India.

It has been listed as 'Least Concern' by the IUCN Red List.

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