

First observation on geophagy by the Golden Langur at Chirang Reserve Forest, Assam

The Golden Langur *Trachypithecus geei* Khajuria, 1956 is a rare and endemic colobine monkey found in the western part of Assam, India, and south-central Bhutan at the Indo-Bhutan border, with its restricted distribution lying north of the Brahmaputra River, bounded on the east by Manas River, and on the west by Sankosh River (Chetry et al. 2010; Das et al. 2013). The Golden Langur occurs in tropical semi-evergreen and tropical moist deciduous forests, dipterocarp, riparian, & sal forests, and occasionally in degraded habitats with secondary growth (Srivastava et al. 2001). It is classified as 'Endangered' in the IUCN Red List (Das et al. 2024) and under Appendix I of CITES.

The Chirang Reserve Forest (26.300–26.520 N & 90.150–90.250 E) under Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), Assam is flanked on the west by the Saralbhanga River, on the north by the international boundary with Bhutan, on the east by the river Bhur, and on the



Adult female Golden Langur licking on soil. © Bishal Basumatary.



Juvenile male Golden Langur feeding on soil. © Bishal Basumatary.

south by National Highway 31. The Chirang Reserve Forest is in the buffer area of the Manas Biosphere Reserve and Ripu-Chirang Elephant Reserve (Das et al. 2013). Based on the different habitat

types and floral composition, the vegetation composition of Chirang Reserve Forest can be primarily divided into dense tropical forests, with a variety of evergreen and semi-evergreen trees,



Adult female Golden Langur observing from tree canopy. © Bishal Basumatary.

moist deciduous forests, dry deciduous forests, Riparian Forests and degraded or scrub forest. Common species include *Shorea robusta*, *Tectona grandis*, *Dillenia indica*, *Ficus auriculata*, *Bombax ceiba*, *Toona ciliata*, *Oroxylum indicum*, and other tree species, contributing to a rich undergrowth. Additionally, the area supports a mix of shrubs, herbs, and climbers that create a dense understory, providing diverse habitats for wildlife.

The Golden Langurs were observed soil licking (geophagy) behaviour was observed in Chirang Reserve Forest during the survey around 1100 h on the way to Ultapani along the roadside just adjacent to a small culvert

(26.694 N, 90.298 E) in the month of October 2023. A Golden Langur troop (10 individuals) was observed with six individuals lingering around the area on trees. An adult female with two juvenile males on the ground were licking soil and one adult female and a female sub-adult were observing from the distant trees. The surrounding habitat of the langur troop was a semi-evergreen forest full of shrubs, climbers, woody plants, and large trees. This is the spot where plenty of butterflies were found mudpuddling. The langurs went from the tree branch to the ground, leaned face down close to the ground and started licking the soil. Other two juvenile males also were feeding on the soil by

picking up a small pinch with their fingers. The feeding bout lasted for six minutes. After feeding, all of them climbed back up the tree about 2.5 m above the ground and then jumped off to the next tree and disappeared from the site.

Chetry & Chetry (2009) reported soil feeding from Umananda Island of Assam which is outside the distribution range of Golden Langur. The present study is within the distribution range in the Chirang Reserve Forest of Assam. Further long-term study of Golden Langur feeding behaviour and soil analysis is required to understand the significance of soil licking behaviour of the Golden Langurs in Assam.

References

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