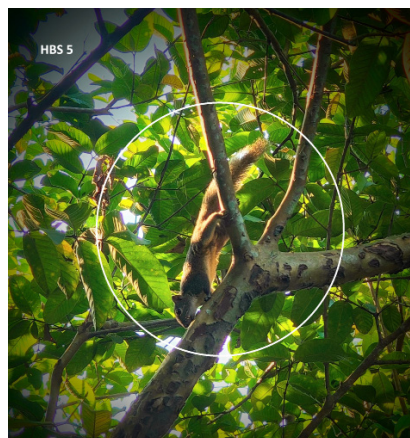
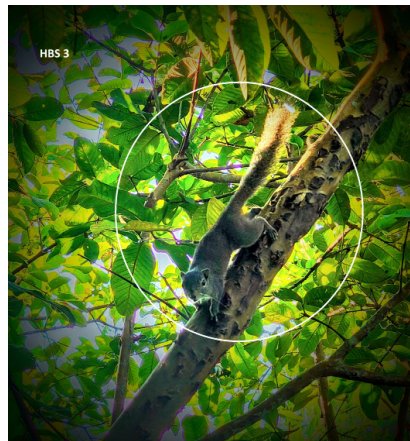
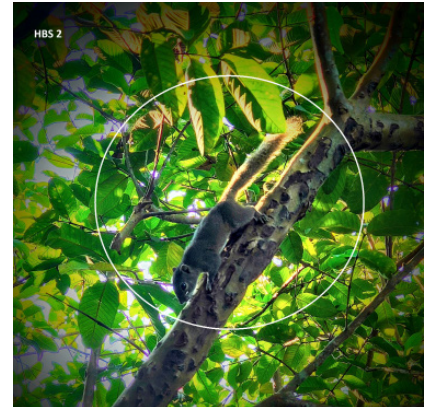
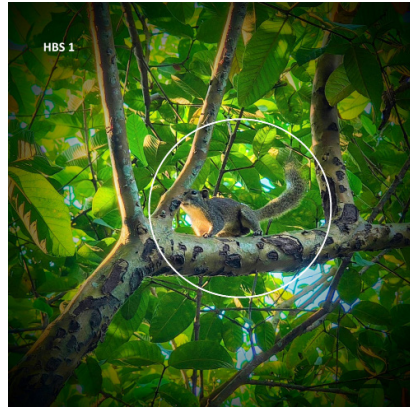




The sighting record of Hoary-bellied Squirrel in Rangia College, Assam, India

Rangia College is one of the leading institutions of higher education located on the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra (26.4271 N, 91.6143 E) in the Kamrup District of Assam, and it falls within the demarcated space of the Himalayan Biodiversity Hotspot although it is not a prescribed part of the hotspot. The campus of Rangia College hosts a great floral diversity with both fruit and non-fruit plants. The predominant fruit plants include *Mangifera indica* L., *Cocos nucifera* L., *Phyllanthus emblica* Linn., *Dillenia indica* L., *Syzygium cumini* (L.) Skeels, *Spondias mombin*, *Carica papaya* L., and *Musa* sp.

During a random walk inside the campus of Rangia College on 3 August 2024, I encountered a total of five Hoary-bellied Squirrels (HBS) *Callosciurus pygerythrus* (I. Geoffroy Saint Hilaire 1832) dwelling on the fruit and non-fruit plants in the campus, which was the very first sighting record of such a high density of HBS inside the



college campus. HBSs were observed inhabiting a vertical range of approximately 10–15 m and frequently foraged on seasonal fruiting plants, such as guava *Psidium* sp., within the campus.

Some photos (HBS 1, HBS 2, HBS 3, HBS 4, and HBS 5) of Hoary-bellied Squirrel spotted inside the campus of Rangia College. © Nitul Ali.

This was a sudden encounter of the species while randomly walking on the campus, as explained by Rawat et al. in 2023. To have a closer look at its morphology, I used a binocular (Nikon Action EX



8x40) and clicked some photographs. It is a species from the family Sciuridae of the order Rodentia belonging to the class Mammalia (Rawat et al. 2023) and one of the major squirrels reported from India (Kalita 2009). HBS is mainly distributed in Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, and Nepal. In India, it is mainly distributed in Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Sikkim, Tripura, and West Bengal (Kalita 2009; Rawat et al. 2023; Thapamagar et al. 2021). The IUCN Red List placed it under the 'Least Concern' category (Duckworth 2016), while it is enlisted as a Schedule-II species under the Indian Wildlife Protection Act (WPA) 1972.

The dorsal side of HBS is exhibited by brown pelage. Its ventral side is characterized by a grey venter and a buffy belly, while at the base of the limbs it is slightly rufous. HBS body is covered by a grizzled or hoary coat. Length of the tail (17–19 cm) is almost the same as the head-body length (18–23 cm). They possess a blunt muzzle and a relatively larger tail characterized by dirty white fur and alternating blackish and yellowish-to-white bands along its length (Rawat et al. 2023).

HBS is generally found to use human-dominated landscapes. They mainly prefer evergreen forests that fall under tropical or subtropical regions (Thapamagar et al. 2021). Their food habits mainly include fruits, nuts, buds, flowers, bark-born fungus, and insects infesting (Kalita 2009; Rawat et al. 2023).

Our college campus provides essential resources for the squirrels, but urban challenges and anthropogenic activities threaten their well-being. Ensuring their protection is not just a

matter of legal compliance but a testament to our commitment to biodiversity and ethical stewardship of the natural world. I urge the college administration, students, and local community members to collaborate on measures to minimize disturbances, raise awareness, and support research for the conservation of this species.

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