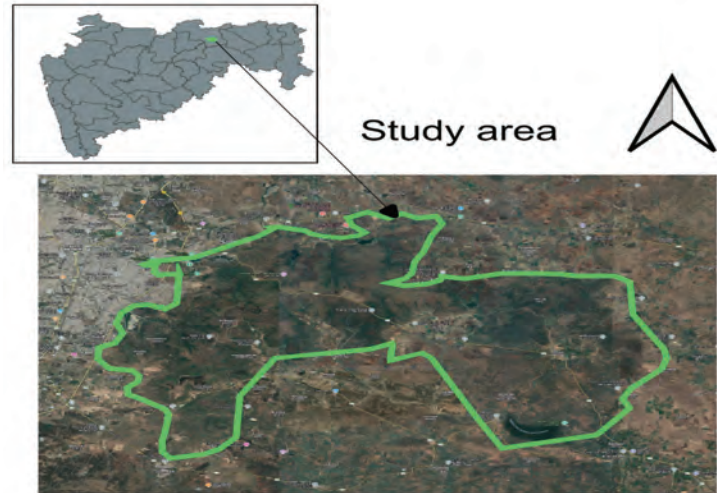


The first photographic record of Gaur from Pohara Malkhed Forest, Amravati, Maharashtra

During regular monitoring with camera traps for leopards in Pohara Malkhed Forest (PMF), a reserve forest adjoining Amravati, Maharashtra, we recorded the presence of a Gaur for the first time. Gaur *Bos gaurus* also known as Indian Bison (sic) is a 'Vulnerable' species as per the IUCN Red List (Duckworth et al. 2016) and is protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection (1972) Act. The estimated global population of Gaur is 15,000–35,000 of which nearly 85% is present in India (Duckworth et al. 2016). Their distribution is highly fragmented and is majorly found in southwestern India, central India, and northeastern India (Choudhury 2002). Out of the three regions central India holds the highest population of Gaur possibly because of the availability of favorable habitats (Ashokkumar et al. 2011).

Gaur is one of the largest herbivores belonging to the family Bovidae. The males are bigger and heavier than the females. An adult male weighs 1,000–1,500 kg whereas a female weighs 700–1,000 kg. The availability of forage is one of the major drivers for distribution of



Study area of Pohara Malkhed Reserve Forest.



Camera trap images of Gaur at Pohara Malkhed Reserve Forest.

Gaur. Though most of the population is found in protected areas, they do move towards the edge for foraging and feeding purposes (Chaiyarat et al. 2021). The home range varies among males and females and is usually observed to have a larger home range in summer as compared to winter and monsoon.

Males can have a home range of 135–142 km² whereas the home range of the female is 32–169 km² (Prayoon et al. 2024). The habitat suitability study by Imam & Kushwaha (2013) in Chandoli Tiger Reserve, India shows that Gaur prefers areas mostly covered by grasses, scrubs, and shrubs, and avoids disturbed areas. Overall, they are adaptable and are found in evergreen, semi-evergreen, moist deciduous, and dry deciduous forests of India (Ashokkumar et al. 2011).

PMF is one of the most diverse reserve forests (Vairale & Wagh 2021) in the Amravati District (Maharashtra) located between 20.903817 N and 77.851733 E. It is a tropical dry deciduous forest (Onkar 2016) with some grassland and spreads in the area of over 80 km².

Youth for Nature Conservation Organization (YNCO), a non-governmental organization along with the Amravati Forest Department, has been working on conservation and monitoring of PMF, especially for Leopard population, since 2010, and started camera trapping from 2015. The Gaur was not reported from this forest in the last 14 years, but in the middle of November, while our Leopard monitoring was going on through camera traps, the Gaur was captured on 20 November 2024, at 0315 PM.

PMF is known to be connected with a wildlife corridor to Melghat Tiger Reserve (MTR) as per the working plan of MTR, which is known to have a good population of Gaur (Choudhury 2002). This reserve forest is nearly 100 km from the tiger reserve. Another tiger reserve is Bor, which is around 138 km from PMF, where the last sighting of Gaur was reported in 2020 (Pinjarkar 2020). BTR is being used as a corridor between Satpuda mountain and Tipeshwar Sanctuary in Yawatmal by large cats and other mammalian species (Wadatkar et al. 2014).

PMF faces several issues such as encroachment for agricultural expansion, illegal cutting of trees, and grazing by locals. Habitat degradation and fragmentation, anthropogenic pressure, and transmission of diseases can be a major possible threat to gaur population in PMF.

Poaching for meat and horns is also a serious concern (Wadatkar et al. 2014). The presence of Gaur in this forest signifies the importance of conserving this forest. Also, it focuses on the need to carry out more studies on habitat use and the movement of the species in the area. Further a genetic study may unveil the migratory route of gaur to PMF to know the potential corridors.

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