

First documentation of a male Smew from Assam



Left: The male Smew during short flights within the wetland. © Chiranjib Bora. Right: The Smew seen associating with Eurasian Coots. © Neeraj Bora.

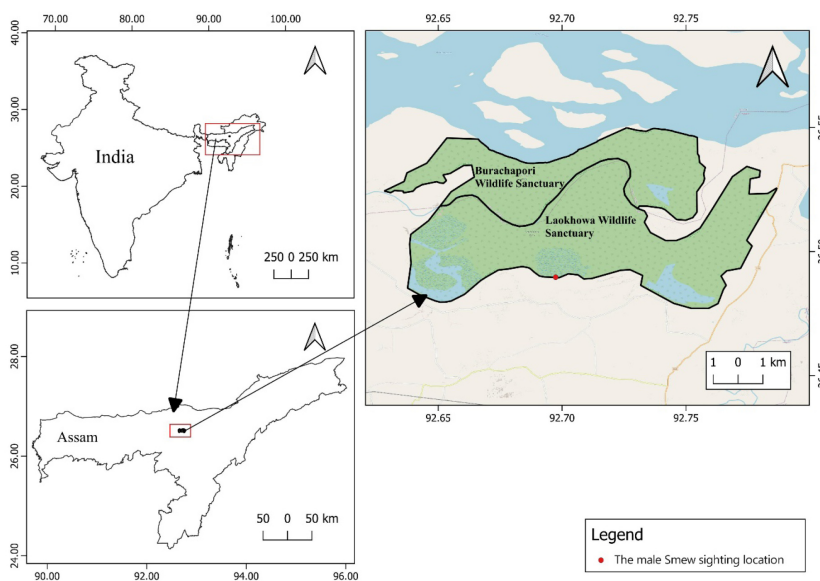
Assam is one of the most biologically diverse regions of southern Asia (Upadhyay & Upadhyay 2025). It is a part of the eastern Himalayan Biodiversity hotspot having a wide range of habitats such as floodplain wetlands, riverine grasslands, tropical forests, and large riparian systems (Chetry et al. 2024). Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve (KNPTR) is an internationally significant conservation area. It sustains an extensive network of wetlands, which supports tens of thousands of migratory waterbirds every winter (Kumar & Alam 2023).

To monitor these avian visitors, KNPTR conducts the Kaziranga Waterbird Count yearly, which has become an important event for tracking population trends, species distribution, and habitat use of the migratory waterbirds throughout the Kaziranga landscape. Laokhowa is a critical buffer of the KNPTR. It is an integral part of the Kaziranga–Laokhowa–

Burhachapori riverine corridor, which facilitates wildlife movement and maintains ecological connectivity across the Brahmaputra floodplains (Yadava 2014).

On 11 January 2026, during the 7th Kaziranga waterbird count at KNPTR, a male Smew *Mergellus albellus* was recorded at the Donduwa Wetland (26.49022° N, 092.69096° E) of Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary (LWS). While we were enumerating the waterbirds as expert observers, we first noticed a white-coloured bird among a flock of Eurasian Coots *Fulica atra*. Upon close observation through binoculars, we confirmed it as a male Smew.

The Smew was observed associating with the group of Eurasian Coots. It was seen actively diving, swimming, and making short, low flights within the wetland indicating normal foraging behaviour.



Map showing location of the male Smew in Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary, Assam.

Smew is a small saw-billed duck of the family Anatidae. It breeds across the boreal and taiga regions of northern Eurasia and winters southwards across temperate Eurasia (Carboneras et al. 2025). It prefers to live in freshwater lakes, slow rivers, and open waterbodies with sufficient fish prey during the non-breeding season. Smews are sexually dimorphic with adult males having a distinct white plumage with black face, with stripes on crest, breast and back, while the females and immatures have a dark grey body and rufous marked (Grimmett et al. 2014).

Although the Indian Subcontinent is outside its regular range, a few individuals occasionally winter in India. However, its occurrence in northeast India is exceptionally rare with only a few records from Assam (Abedin & Abedin 2021).

Notably, all previously documented individuals from Assam have been females. The present observation therefore represents the first

photographic documentation of a male Smew from Assam, adding an important new record to the region's avifauna. This also highlights the importance of systematic waterbird monitoring in KNPTTR.

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