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Bosch Wetland Restoration Phase III on ground restoration activities official kick off



As part of the phase III of Wetland restoration project at Nallusamy Checkdam, Keeranatham, Tamil Nadu supported as a CSR initiative of Bosch Global Software Technologies, Zooreach team conducted a small inauguration after receiving permission to start the clean up, plantation and fencing at Nallusamy Checkdam.

This inauguration was held in the morning half on 10 July 2026 and was graced by the presence of Mr. Balachander, Village Administration Officer, Mr. Balaji, Panchayat

Secretary, Mr. Palanisami and Mr. Sukumar, former Panchayat presidents, Mr. Nagoor Kani, Bosch Global Software Technologies (BGSW) at Nallusamy Checkdam, and Dr Sanjay Molur, Executive Director, Zoo Outreach Organisation. The Program started with a brief introduction of the project including activities undertaken in Phase I and Phase II (rapid biodiversity assessments, perception surveys, seed collection, nursery set up, development of education materials and outreach events) outline of the activities such as clean up





including removal of non-native species, plantation of native plant species and fencing to maintain the restoration site. This was followed by introduction of the special guests mentioning their immense contribution to the development of Keeranatham region, and their felicitation with a native plant sapling and education materials.

The guests were very interested in the project and provided valuable insights to implement the work along with providing local context to activities undertaken by them in the past and also building connections with local stakeholders. The other members attending the event included members from the local partner - Koushika Neer Karangal, volunteers from BGSW, local landowners, and the Zooreach Team.

This event is crucial to mark the beginning of the on-ground implementation of restoration activities and it is extremely encouraging for the Zooreach team to see the project reach its fruition.



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Conservation Action Plan Workshop for Hornbills of Arunachal Pradesh



Arunachal Pradesh is located within the Himalayan biodiversity hotspot and represents a critical stronghold for hornbill conservation. Five species of hornbills occur in the state, the globally threatened Great Hornbill, Wreathed Hornbill, Rufous-necked Hornbill, Austen's Brown Hornbill, and the Oriental Pied Hornbill.

The state has around 65% of the forests classified as unclassed state forests (USFs) which are also commonly called community forests governed by 26 Arunachal tribes; and the rest of the forest area comes under protected areas and reserved forests. Habitat loss and hunting remain a continuous challenge in most of these forest areas and need immediate attention for conservation of all animals including Hornbills.



Working in the Arunachal landscape for past 25 years, the Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF) team understands that a state-wide Conservation Action Plan is needed to promote indigenous stewardship to protect hornbills and their habitats in the community forests and forests outside PAs in Arunachal Pradesh

integrated with scientific research and monitoring based on ecological knowledge. Also, measures to strengthen hornbill conservation inside PAs are necessary both to halt the decline of hornbills and secure the future of hornbill populations in the state.

Hosted by Arunachal Pradesh University at Pasighat, the Conservation Action Plan for Hornbills of Arunachal Pradesh held on 16–18 July 2026, marked a





crucial milestone towards conservation of hornbills in the state. Nature Conservation Foundation, India organized the workshop and it was facilitated by Zoo Outreach Organisation and Conservation Planning Specialist Group, South Asia. The workshop invited 55+ participants from three states, Assam, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh; from more than 25 organisations, including forest departments, NGOs, and community groups.

The major objectives of the workshop were to:

1. Develop a collaborative landscape-level vision for hornbill conservation;
2. Strengthen scientific evidence-based and culturally grounded action;
3. Build regional and inter-state partnerships, capacity, and networks; and
4. Action-oriented implementation timeline and policy possibilities.

The workshop started with setting baselines on existing knowledge of hornbill population, habitat, threat, community interaction, cultural significance, management strategies, and past research. Everyone participated and provided

all the different information they had on hornbills that affect the conservation status of the species. Once the context was set, all the participants together set the vision for Hornbill Conservation in the state in collaboration with all stakeholders. Once the vision was set, participants started understanding the different threats the species is facing throughout the state and discussed goals to combat each of the threats.

The workshop ended successfully involving all participants towards a shared vision to conserve hornbills in Arunachal Pradesh in collaboration with each other.



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Rhinoceroses exhibited in the People's Park of Madras

In Bangalore, the Lal Bagh Park received a pair of Greater One-horned Rhinoceros *Rhinoceros unicornis* in 1868. The female lived there until 8 March 1893, but she proved incompatible with the male which was “deported to another state” (Rookmaaker 2024). It is likely that the male was moved in 1870 to the ‘Government Gardens’ in the People’s Park of Chennai (Madras), where a large rhino was seen in March 1871 and again on 13 December 1875 (Rookmaaker 2024). The inventories of animals in Chennai as found in the administration report of the Madras Municipality (1877–1899) included one rhinoceros on 31 March 1878, 1 January 1879, 1 January 1881, and 31 March 1886. This male *R. unicornis* was unknown to Rookmaaker (1998).

The reports of the municipality also provide details of repairs of the rhinoceros enclosure:

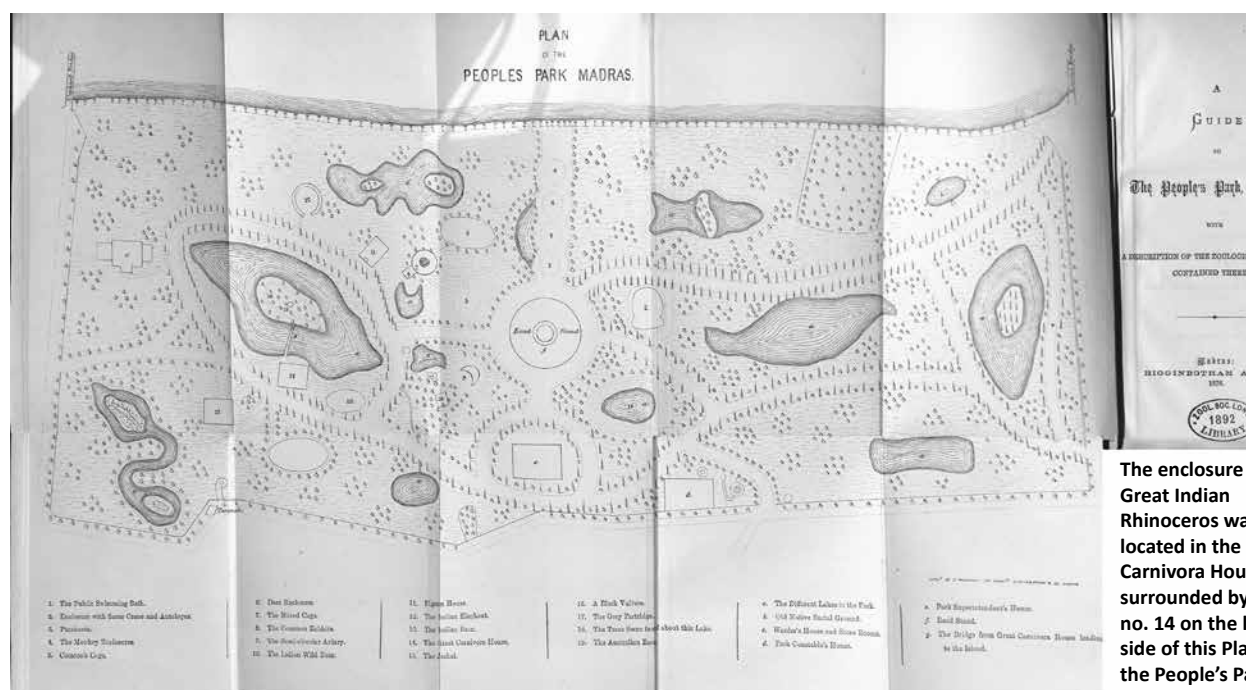
1877-78: Expenses include repair of rhinoceros enclosure and Picottah Rs 41.

1880: Expenses include planking and repairing the rhinoceros enclosure Rs 138.

1887-88: Expenses include repair of rhinoceros cage Rs 253.

On 27 July 1890, Dougherty (1892) visited the People's Park, where "the miserable Zoo has only three specimens worth looking at – an ancient battered rhinoceros without a horn, and two fine otters [and] a couple of funny-looking badgers must not be overlooked."

The animal probably died in the 1890s before the accession of another rhinoceros in 1898.



The enclosure of the Great Indian Rhinoceros was located in the Great Carnivora House, surrounded by water, no. 14 on the left side of this Plan of the People's Park, Madras (from Madras Zoo 1876). Courtesy Zoological Society of London.

Unfortunately, the administration reports of the 1890s do not include a comprehensive list of all animals, nor is there a record about the death of a rhinoceros, but the years 1890–1893 are missing from the available literature. The One-horned Rhinoceros lived for a remarkable number of years in the Zoo, from 1870 to at least 1890.

According to the administration report of 1898–99, a ‘Rhinoceros’ was received in People’s Park on 7 June 1898: “not paid yet.” From other sources it is known that this animal was caught when just a year old by John Hagenbeck (1866–1940) in Padang, Sumatra (Rookmaaker et al. 2002). This female Sumatran Rhinoceros *Dicerorhinus sumatrensis* was still alive on 1 May 1913 (Flower 1914). It may have died shortly afterwards because in the financial year 1916/17 “the rhinoceros enclosure in the menagerie at the People’s Park was converted into a lion enclosure by adding two masonry rooms and erecting a high iron bar fence” (Madras Presidency 1917). Maybe further research might find an exact date, or even a photograph.

These records of a Greater One-horned Rhinoceros, followed by a Sumatran Rhino, in the zoo in Chennai might have to be supplemented by a third species, the Javan Rhinoceros *R. sondaicus*.

There was a rumour that an animal captured in the Dindings, Malaysia by a forest ranger, Granville Maurice O’Hara (d.1939) in September 1905 was traded later in the year to Chennai for Rs. 1500 (Rookmaaker 2024). No confirmation of arrival in India has ever been found. It is probably unlikely that the zoo would invest in a

rhinoceros while their only enclosure was still occupied by another species.

The zoo in Chennai is one of the few institutions where two, possibly even three, different species of rhinoceros have been exhibited in the 19th Century.

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First report of the Black and Golden Cicada *Huechys fusca* from India in Manas National Park, Assam

Abstract: A rare Black and Golden Cicada, *Huechys fusca* Distant 1892 was observed in Manas National Park, Assam, India, during a field survey. This sighting highlights the region's biodiversity and underscores the need for ongoing conservation efforts to protect the park's diverse ecosystems and endangered species.

Keywords: Black and golden cicada, Conservation, Manas National Park

Running Title: First report of *Huechys fusca* from India

The cicadas (Hemiptera: Cicadidae) of the Indian subcontinent have received little attention since the early 20th Century like the other insects in the area (Price et al. 2016). Cicadidae is the largest family of cicadas, comprising around 3,000 species, with roughly 204 of these species native to India (Sarkar 2024). The genus *Huechys* comprises 24 living species of cicadas. One species, *Huechys fusca* Distant 1892 is found in most southeastern Asian countries. It has been recorded in Sumatra, the Malay Peninsula (including Singapore), and Borneo (Leong et al. 2011). Among the 24 species of the *Huechys* genus, five species are recorded in

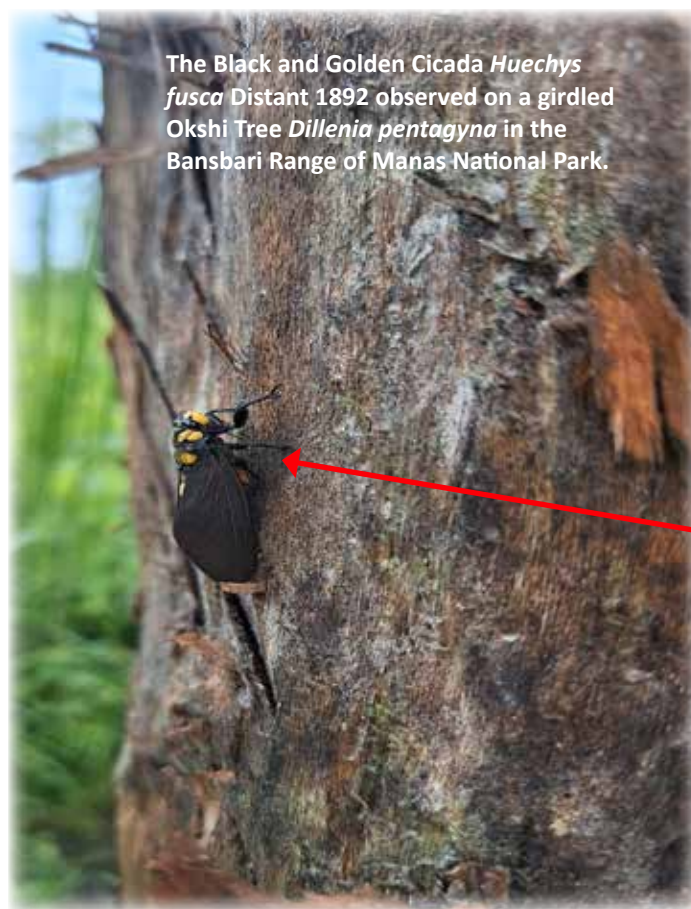
India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. These species include *H. beata* Chou, Lei, Li, Lu & Yao 1997, *H. haematica* Distant 1888, *H. testacea testacea* (Fabricius 1787), *H. sanguinea sanguinea* (De Geer 1773), and *H. thoracica* Distant 1879. Moreover, among these five species, *H. beata* Chou et al. 1997, *H. sanguinea sanguinea* (De Geer 1773), and *H. thoracica* (Distant 1879) have been recorded from Assam.

It is important to note that this reference to Assam pertains to the region as it existed during the British colonial period, which may differ from the present-day Indian state of Assam (Price et al. 2016). Despite its occurrence in neighbouring countries, *Huechys fusca* has not been recorded from India until now.

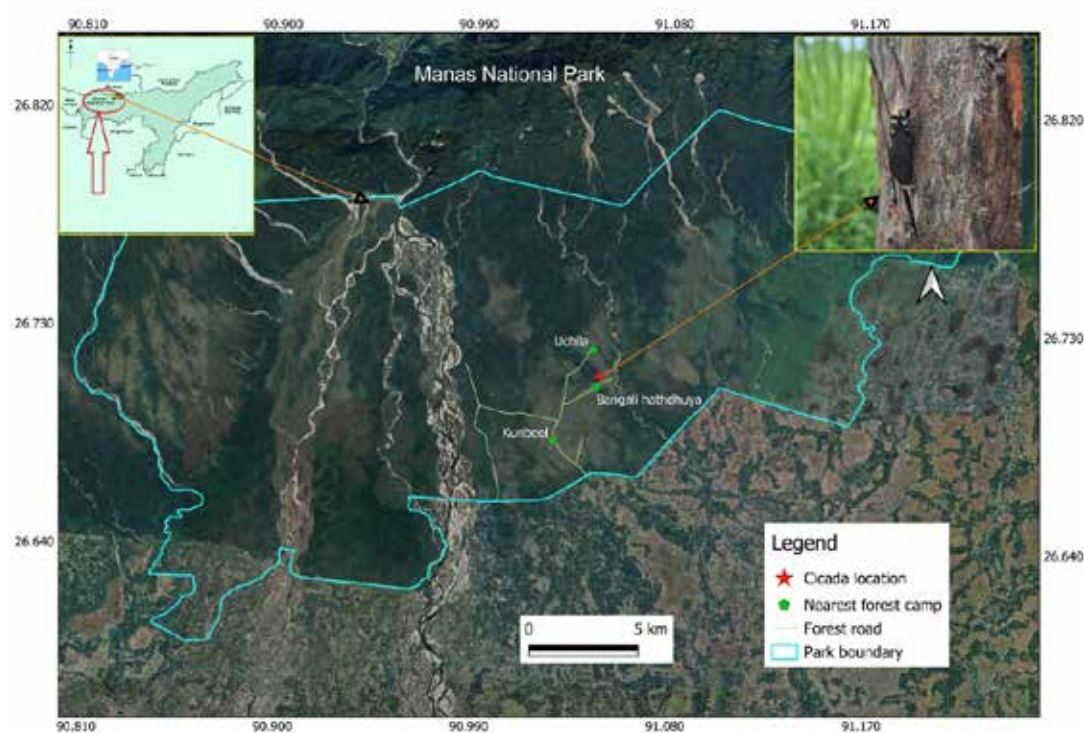
The cicada diversity of Assam remains inadequately studied, and this report represents the first confirmed record of *H. fusca* from India, significantly extending the distribution range of the species. The specimen was observed in Manas National Park (MNP) a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Tiger Reserve and Biosphere Reserve within the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) of Assam. Characterized by a mosaic of forests, grasslands and aquatic habitats and MNP harbours a remarkable diversity of rare,



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The Black and Golden Cicada *Huechys fusca* Distant 1892 observed on a girdled Okshi Tree *Dillenia pentagyna* in the Bansbari Range of Manas National Park.



Sighting location of the Black and Golden Cicada in Manas National Park.



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threatened and endemic species making it an important region for biodiversity conservation. MNP (26°35′-26°50′N, 90°45′-91°15′E) serves as the core area of the Manas Biosphere Reserve, covering 500 km² within the Baksa and Chirang districts of the BTR. The park is divided into three ranges: Bansbari (central), Bhuyanpara (eastern), and Panbari (western).

Manas National Park's forests are classified into six types: sub-Himalayan high alluvial semi evergreen forests, eastern Bhabhar sal type forests, eastern Himalayan moist mixed deciduous forests, low alluvial savannah woodlands, Assam Valley semi evergreen forests, and eastern wet alluvial grassland, each with distinct flora and characteristics (Champion & Seth 1968). On 20 May 2024, during a field survey near the Bangale hat-dhuwa forest camp (26.70718° N, 91.04639° E) in the Bansbari range of MNP, we had an extraordinary encounter. At approximately 1050 h, under a clear and sunny sky, we observed a cicada (26.71151° N, 91.04753° E) perched on a girdling of an Okshi Tree *Dillenia pentagyna*.

This remarkable sighting lasted for about a minute before the cicada flew away. The cicada, identified as *Huechys fusca* Distant 1892 (black and golden cicada) by experts and documented in "A Monograph of Oriental Cicadidae" by W.L. Distant (1892), has distinct characteristics such as body and legs black; two large spots on mesonotum, either orange or pale yellow; abdomen dark orange-yellow, narrowly black at

base; tegmina pale fuscous; the venation, basal cell, and costal membrane blackish; wings very pale fuscous, semi-hyaline.

The pronotum is pale yellow, which is blackish in *Huechys sanguinea* (De Geer 1773); the striations to the face are coarse and profound; ommatidial colour is blackish in this species, whereas it is dark yellow in *H. sanguinea* (De Geer 1773) (Distant 1892). The forest in this part of the park is characterized by a low alluvial savannah woodland, supporting a rich and diverse vegetation cover. The habitat is dominated primarily by grass species, followed by tree species. The site is characterized by the herbaceous layer dominated by *Saccharum narenga*, *Imperata cylindrica*, *Apluda mutica*, *Ophiuros exaltatus*, *Eulalia fastigiata*, *Arundinella nepalensis* and *Costus speciosus* and tree associates including *Dillenia pentagyna*, *Careya arborea*, *Sterculia villosa*, *Bombax ceiba*, *Gmelina arborea*, *Lagerstroemia parviflora*, *Oroxylum indicum*, *Callicarpa arborea*, *Duabanga grandiflora*, and *Litsea salicifolia* (Champion & Seth 1968).

This record is particularly significant as it sheds light on the habitat preferences and natural history of the elusive black and golden cicada, *Huechys fusca*, within the Manas National Park, an important biodiversity hotspot. The diverse flora of this region supports a rich and complex ecosystem, vital for the survival of a wide range of wildlife, including this rare cicada. Such observations underscore the importance



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of continued conservation efforts in the park to protect these habitats. Continued protection of this habitat and its endangered species are essential for maintaining the biodiversity of Manas National Park, highlighting the need for sustained ecological stewardship.

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New locality record of Hog Deer in Sumera Forest Nursery, Uttar Pradesh

The Hog Deer *Axis porcinus* is a medium-sized cervid historically distributed across northern India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and parts of southeastern Asia (Biswas et al. 2002). The species is closely associated with tall alluvial grasslands and floodplain ecosystems, particularly within the Terai Arc Landscape and Brahmaputra Basin (Johnsingh et al. 2004; Sinha et al. 2019).

Biswas et al. 2004 reviewed the status of Hog Deer in India and reported a widespread decline across its range due to habitat loss, grassland conversion, and hunting pressure. The species was found to persist mainly in small, isolated populations within protected areas such as Kaziranga, Manas, and Dudhwa, highlighting its dependence on conservation-managed habitats also reported that Hog Deer populations in the Gangetic plains had become increasingly fragmented and dispersed because of extensive habitat loss, agricultural expansion, and degradation of floodplain grasslands, restricting the species to isolated grassland patches and remnant floodplain habitats. Later, Ahmed & Khan (2015)

conducted ecological studies in Dudhwa National Park and estimated a Hog Deer density of 3.09 individuals/km² in the alluvial floodplains, while also documenting their preference for upland grasslands, small herd sizes, and female-biased sex ratios.

Subsequently, Paul et al. (2018) highlighted similar patterns of habitat fragmentation and declining wetland-grassland connectivity in cervid populations of the upper Gangetic plains, emphasizing the need for landscape level habitat conservation. In northeastern India, Sinha et al. (2019) conducted intensive



Sumera Forest Nursery: Hog Deer sighting locations. Source: Google Earth.



Hog Deer sighting along the nursery edge. © Shaikh Rahim.

population assessments in Manas National Park and documented major temporal fluctuations in Hog Deer abundance, with populations declining from historical estimates of nearly 10,000 individuals in 1983 to 1,626 individuals before recovering to $3,545 \pm 647.64$ individuals in 2019 following conservation and habitat restoration efforts.

Over the past few decades, Hog Deer populations have undergone significant decline due to habitat loss, fragmentation, agricultural expansion, grassland degradation, and poaching (Bhowmik 2002; Biswas 2004; Angom et al. 2020).

In India, important populations persist in protected landscapes; however, information from non-protected and human-modified landscapes remains

limited and poorly documented. Such areas may still serve as secondary habitats, dispersal corridors, or temporary refuges for the species. Uttar Pradesh, particularly its western region, has experienced extensive land-use change, resulting in severe reduction of natural grasslands.



Habitat near sighting. © Shaikh Rahim.



Hog Deer subadult male. © Shaikh Rahim.

Consequently, records of Hog Deer from non-protected landscapes in this region are rare. The present study reports opportunistic sightings of Hog Deer from Sumera Forest Nursery in Aligarh District, thereby contributing a new locality record and highlighting the conservation relevance of small habitat patches outside protected areas.

Sumera Forest Nursery (~0.19 km²) is located in Jawan Block, Aligarh District, Uttar Pradesh, India. The study area lies within the Gangetic plains and is characterized by a mosaic of plantation patches, grassland fragments, and agricultural fields. The vegetation is dominated by cane grass *Triplidium benghalense*, bamboo stands, and plantation species such as *Diospyros montana* and *Streblus asper*. The nursery

is bordered by the upper Ganga Canal and intensively cultivated agricultural land.

Despite its small size and anthropogenic pressures, the area provides structural vegetation cover and forage resources that may support wildlife species. Such modified landscapes are increasingly recognized for their potential ecological role as refuges or stepping-stone habitats in fragmented ecosystems.

Field observations were conducted opportunistically between April and May 2017 during postgraduate research fieldwork. Surveys were not systematic but involved repeated visits to the study area during different times of the day. Sightings were recorded through direct visual observation, and photographs were taken when possible. Geographic coordinates were recorded using a handheld GPS device. Species identification was based on standard morphological features described in previous studies (Biswas 2004; Ahmed & Khan 2015).

Fawn: small body size, spotted coat (early stages); **sub-adult:** intermediate body size, absence of fully developed antlers; **adult male:** presence of three-tined antlers; **female:** absence of antlers, smaller build.

Location: Sumera Forest Nursery, Jawan, Aligarh (UP), India

Details of Sighting

Date	Time	Individual observed	Habitat/Notes
27.iv.2017	1445 h	Subadult	Sheltering under <i>Diospyros montana</i> & <i>Streblus asper</i>
13.v.2017	1715 h	Subadult	Feeding near bamboo & cane grass; visible 3–4 mins
16.v.2017	1735 h	Subadult + Adult male	Cane grass; adult with antlers

GPS Coordinates: HDS1: 28.04508° N, 78.11186° E; HDS2: 28.04425° N, 78.11313° E
These observations indicate that Hog Deer may persist or intermittently utilize small habitat fragments outside formally protected areas. The use of cane grass, bamboo thickets, and plantation edges suggests behavioural flexibility where suitable cover and forage remain available.

The presence of both sub-adult and adult individuals may indicate temporary residency or a small remnant local population, although further evidence is required before inferring breeding status. In the intensively modified Gangetic plains, forest nurseries, riparian fields, and grass-dominated edges may function as refuges or movement corridors for ungulates. Such habitats are rarely surveyed, and their conservation value is often underestimated.

Potential threats in the area include habitat degradation, vegetation clearing, encroachment, livestock grazing, feral dogs, road mortality, and human disturbance. Since the present records are old (2017), resurveys are needed to confirm current occurrence. Camera trapping, pellet surveys, and local ecological interviews may help determine occupancy and seasonal use.

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New distribution records of *Ahaetulla laudankia* from Pune, Raigad, and Thane districts of Maharashtra



Full body view of *Ahaetulla laudankia* in life. © Amit Sayyed.

The Asian vine snakes of the genus *Ahaetulla* Link, 1807 are diurnal, arboreal, rear-fanged (opisthoglyphous) colubrids widely distributed across tropical Asia. The genus currently comprises approximately 21 species, with India harboring 13 species, of which nine are endemic (Deepak et al. 2019; Mallik et al. 2020).

Ahaetulla laudankia (Deepak et al. 2019) is a recently described species from peninsular India, distinguished by a combination of morphological characters including dorsal scale rows (15:15:13), ventral scales (192–202), and divided subcaudals (154–185). Since its description from Odisha and Rajasthan, its known distribution has expanded to



Head of *Ahaetulla laudankia* (lateral view). © Amit Sayyed.

Gujarat (Patel et al. 2019), Nepal (Rawat et al. 2020), and northeastern India (Purkayastha et al. 2021). However, recent taxonomic reassessments suggest that northeastern and Nepal populations may represent *Ahaetulla longirostris* rather than *A. laudankia* (Mirza et al. 2024).

In Maharashtra, the species has been sparsely documented, with records from Palghar and nearby regions (Narayanan & Mohapatra 2021; Patel et al. 2023). Despite these records, *A. laudankia* remains poorly understood in terms of its distribution and ecology in the state. Recent taxonomic revisions within the genus have further highlighted the need for accurate, locality-based records (Mallik et al. 2020), particularly in regions where earlier

identifications may require re-evaluation (Walmiki et al. 2012).

In this study, we report new distributional records of *A. laudankia* from Pune, Raigad, and Thane districts of Maharashtra based on 10 individuals. Morphometric and meristic data from four specimens were used to confirm species identity, while additional records were obtained from verified rescue observations. These findings contribute to improving the current understanding of the species' distribution in the northern Western Ghats. Data for this study were collected from 10 individuals of *A. laudankia*, including four individuals recorded through personal observations and six individuals obtained from rescue records and citizen scientist



contributions, from diverse locations across the Pune, Raigad, and Thane districts of Maharashtra between 2014 and 2026. In all cases, photographic documentation was provided by local rescuers and citizen scientists to verify the sightings. Species identification was confirmed using the diagnostic keys provided by Deepak et al. (2019) and Mallik et al. (2020). For four of the 10 individuals, detailed morphometric and meristic data were recorded in nature during random fieldwork. Meristic characters, including ventral scales counted according to Dowling 1951, sub-caudal scales, and dorsal scale row reduction, were examined to ensure accurate differentiation from sympatric congeners.

Photographs capturing the diagnostic dermal appendage, ventral colouration, and mid-ventral lines serve as digital vouchers for this study. Precise geographic coordinates for four of the 10 were recorded using handheld GPS units, data for the remaining rescued individuals were extracted from images. The identification of all specimens was confirmed as *Ahaetulla*

laudankia based on the presence of a distinct dermal appendage, a brown dorsum with black spots, and the characteristic copper-orange ventral coloration with white mid-ventral lines.

All observations reported in this study were based on field sightings and rescue records. No animals were harmed, collected, or handled for experimental purposes. Data collection complied with applicable wildlife protection guidelines and ethical standards.

Detailed meristic data for four representative individuals are summarized below:

Specimen 1 from Raigad was observed by the first author on 13 January 2026 at Bhira. The total length was approximately 1,127 mm. Scale rows: 15:15:13; ventrals: 195; subcaudals: 154+ (tail tip was likely damaged).

Specimen 2 from Raigad was observed by the first author on 1 February 2026 at Poladpur. The total length was approximately 1,280 mm. Scale rows: 15:15:13; ventrals: 198; subcaudals: 181.

Present the data of the specimens observed and scale count where present (? =data not available, += damaged tail).

	Location	Latitude, longitude & elevation	Dorsal	Ventrals	Sub-caudal
1	Bhira, Raigad, Maharashtra	18.4554° N 73.3861° E; 96 m	15: 15: 13	195	154+
2	Poladpur, Raigad, Maharashtra	17.9838° N 73.4620° E; 46 m	15: 15: 13	198	181
3	Yewalewadi, Katraj Pune, Maharashtra	18.4003° N 73.8947° E; 956 m	15: 15: 13	192	170
4	Kokanipada, Thane, Maharashtra	19.2323° N 72.9642° E; 55 m	15: 15: 13	193	167
5	Pune, Maharashtra	18.3535° N 73.8224° E; 800 m	?	?	?
6	Pune, Maharashtra	18.3427° N 73.8427° E; 759 m	?	?	?
7	Badlapur, Thane, Maharashtra	19.1682° N 73.2261° E; 29 m	?	?	?
8	Pune, Maharashtra	18.4371° N 73.8348° E; 719 m	?	?	?
9	Pune, Maharashtra	18.3985° N 73.8551° E; 986 m	?	?	?
10	Pune, Maharashtra	18.3431° N 73.7581° E; 873 m	?	?	?



Specimen 3 from Pune was a juvenile observed by second author on 21 December 2014 at Yewalewadi, Katraj. Total length approximately 610 mm. Ventrals: 192; subcaudals: 170. This represents one of the earliest undocumented records of the species in the region, previously likely misidentified as *A. nasuta*.

Specimen 4 from Kokanipada, Thane was observed by Shashank Raul on 11 July 2023. Total length approximately 1,737 mm. Scale rows: 15:15:13; ventrals: 193; subcaudals: 167. This specimen represents a significant maximum size record for the species.

The present study expands the known distribution of *Ahaetulla laudankia* across the northern Western Ghats and adjoining coastal regions of Maharashtra. Earlier records in the state were limited to Palghar and nearby areas (Narayanan & Mohapatra 2021; Patel et al. 2023). The new records from Pune, Raigad, and Thane districts indicate a wider distribution than previously understood, filling an important geographic gap in the northern Western Ghats.

The occurrence of *A. laudankia* across habitats ranging from low-elevation coastal areas such as Badlapur (29 m) to higher-elevation localities such as Katraj, Pune (986 m) suggests considerable ecological tolerance. This indicates that the species is not restricted to a narrow habitat type and may inhabit both forested and semi-urban landscapes where adequate arboreal cover is available. Observations from peri-urban areas further highlight its potential adaptability to human-modified environments.

The use of rescue data and citizen science observations highlights the importance of non-traditional data sources in documenting cryptic species. Vine snakes, due to their cryptic and camouflaging slender morphology and arboreal habits, are often overlooked during conventional surveys. In addition, historical confusion with closely related taxa, particularly *A. nasuta*, has contributed to gaps in distributional knowledge. Recent taxonomic revisions (Mallik et al. 2020) necessitate re-evaluation of earlier records, and it is likely that some reports of *A. nasuta* from Maharashtra represent *A. laudankia*.

Meristic data from examined individuals fall within the diagnostic range of *A. laudankia* (Deepak et al. 2019), confirming species identity. The Thane specimen (~1,737 mm total length) represents a notable size record, suggesting the species may attain larger sizes than previously reported; however, further sampling is required to confirm this. Despite these findings, aspects of the species' ecology, including diet, reproduction, and population structure, remain poorly understood.

In conclusion, the present study emphasizes the need for systematic surveys and re-evaluation of historical records to accurately document the distribution of *Ahaetulla laudankia*.

The integration of field observations, rescue data, and citizen science can significantly improve our understanding of such cryptic arboreal species and support future conservation efforts.



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Chasing hornbills: a three-year campus bird count review

Note to the Reader

To the ones reading: you don't need to be a "birder" to enjoy this. I'm writing for those who, like me once, haven't yet been introduced to the world flying right above their heads. P.S. If you see a bird name you don't recognize, look it up—it will bring this story to life! This is a review of the GITAM Visakhapatnam Campus, nestled in the "City of Destiny."

It began with a conversation with a campus security staff member. We were sharing what we knew—he showed me photos of herons and Openbill Storks from his village, while I described the residents of our campus. Just as our preparatory session for beginners (which had turned from a 40-minute talk into a two-hour "crusade") ended, a fascinating sound echoed: the cackling call of the Indian Grey Hornbill *Ocyrceros birostris*.

Despite the best efforts of my tired troop to pin it down, the bird remained a "fancy tale" I used to keep them motivated. But I am not shy about having fancy wants when I'm with nature, nor am I disappointed when reality doesn't deliver. Everything is already magical. This search for the elusive call perfectly captures my three-year journey with the campus bird count (CBC), an annual citizen science initiative that has transformed how we monitor our campus biodiversity.

Year 1 – The whimsical beginning (CBC'24)

Before our first count, many of us didn't even know two different species of crows lived here. Our very own "Indiana Jones," professor Harish Prakash, introduced us to birding through a WWF collaboration. We learned to use binoculars, eBird, and the Merlin app to identify calls, and use checklists. We discovered the Shikra's taste for Rock Pigeons and the stunning red shoulder patches of Alexandrine Parakeets blending into African Tulip trees.

My own passion peaked on a bizarre whim: firing a random camera flash into the dark patches of the campus at night, hoping for a miracle. Drumroll, please—zooming in on the image later, I discovered a shy Spotted Owlet hidden on a tiny branch, its eyes glowing yellow! We went from novices to identifying 20 species by call in just four days, documenting 38 species total and earning WWF recognition as "top birders" among 178 Indian campuses.

The magic of science: comparing diversity

In the quiet months between year 1 and year 2, we used our new skills to measure the "evenness" of our campus patches.

Campus Bird Diversity Across Patches

Site	Shannon index (H)	Evenness (E)	Interpretation
Gandhi Park	0.623	0.685	More stable: balanced distribution of species.
Ganesh Park	0.662	0.478	Top-heavy: more species, but dominated by a few (like crows).

This taught us that biodiversity equals stable, resilient life. Just like the ocean relies on microscopic plankton to prevent a collapse, every tiny campus ecosystem is part of a massive, fragile chain. If you look at a tree and only see timber, you're missing the ocean for the drop.

Year 2 – The battalion (CBC'25)

By year 2, my buddy Aditya and I had formed our own club. With a 30-sized “troop” at our peak, we conquered every nook of the campus. We added dramatic species like the Common Hawk-Cuckoo and the colorful Chestnut-headed Bee-eater.

We even found a Coppersmith Barbet—a chubby craftsman who carves nests into dead wood. Dead does not mean done!

We recorded 46 species during the event, with the magnificent Eastern Barn Owl as our popular star. Our yearly count climbed to 55 species.

Year 3 – The missing “red flag” (CBC'26)

This year, a brave troop of 15 “green poets” showed up despite mid-semester exams. We were greeted by a mixed species flock: cheeky Rufous Treepies, vibrant Black-rumped Flameback, and a Golden Oriole. We even spotted the Blyth's Reed Warbler, a tiny brown bird that migrates all the way from the Finland-Siberia region!

However, the atmosphere felt slightly bleak. In previous years, we easily spotted 4–8 Red-vented and White-browed Bulbuls. This year,



we struggled to find even one and none of the Red-Whiskered Bulbul. This stark difference highlights why the CBC is so important—it tracks the “quiet disappearances” of common birds as much as the loud arrivals of rare ones.

The finale: The hornbill returns

On the last day of the event, I went out with one final whim. I wished to record a hornbill



Shikra (*Tachypiza badia*)



Jungle Babbler (*Argya striata*)



Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*)



Spotted Owlet (*Athene brama*)



Blue-tailed Bee-eater (*Merops philippinus*)



Asian Koel (*Eudynamys scolopaceus*)



Alexandrine Parakeet (*Psittacula eupatria*)



Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus kundoo*)



White-throated Kingfisher
(*Halcyon smyrnensis*)



Shikra (*Tachypiza badia*)

Images © Siddharth Palla.

and a tiny bush bird (specifically the Small Minivet).

Ten minutes into our final checklist, as I peered into a dusky patch under thick canopy cover, I saw a struggling, uncomfortable movement on a creeper. A head untangled itself, revealing an unproportionately gigantic casque and a raw, archaic face— a mean grey metallic horn and a red eye. I absolutely lost my mind for over a minute. It wasn't my first time seeing an Indian Grey Hornbill, but it was the first time seeing it exactly when I wanted to.

Before I could even regain my senses, it was gone, leaving only that unmistakable cackling call echoing behind it, as if asking everyone to settle. To top it off, we recorded an Orange-headed Thrush (tiny and orange!) moments later. Both wishes, granted.

Unfolding now

The CBC '26 ended with 43 species recorded, bringing our total campus life-list to 69 species. From the declining numbers of bulbuls to the changing roosting sites of Egrets, every aspect of this urban setting is worth exploring.

We are now moving forward to study how we can better support ancient frugivores (fruit-eaters) and protect the “precious dead wood” that houses our campus residents. This is but one chapter in the ongoing chronicle of the Green Poets Society. Reach out if you're curious; we are long past the beginning, yet far from the end, with so many more stories left to write.

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First breeding record of Jerdon's Baza from Kanger Valley National Park, Chhattisgarh, India



Vigil from the perch. © Ameet Mandavia.

The Jerdon's Baza *Aviceda jerdoni* is found in the eastern Himalaya from Bengal Duars to the Assam Valley, Western Ghats, Eastern Ghats, and northern Odisha (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It is confined to evergreen foothills biotope between 350 and 1,800 m. Food comprises of mainly lizards, grasshoppers and other insects (Baker 1928; Ali & Ripley 1987).

The breeding season of the species is normally from April to June. Nest is built at the height of 7–20 m. It is a well-made structure, shallow cup of leafy twigs occasionally lined with grass and woods but always with fresh green leaves. The young birds are like the adult females though the young males soon become darker above.

The tail has four or sometimes five distinct bands and the bases of the feathers are much mottled with white (Baker 1928). Birds are sometimes seen in family parties of up to five individuals but normally found in pairs. It spends long periods perched in a tree on the lookout for prey which is captured on the ground. Pairs often soar at height over forest at the onset of the breeding (Grimmett et al. 1998).

The Jerdon's Baza has been recorded from Bastar Division of Chhattisgarh by Chandra & Singh (2004). Past studies from Madhya Pradesh (Central India) were carried out by Osmaston (1922), D'Abreu (1931, 1935), Hewetson (1956),



Alerted due to our approach.
© Ameet Mandavia.



Chick collected from the nest by a hunter.
© Ameet Mandavia



Perched low. © Ameet Mandavia.

Sightings of the species have been reported from Kanger Valley National Park and Machkote Forest Range

	Year	Month	No. of sightings	No. of birds seen
1	2016	March, April	4	6
2	2017	January, February, March, April, May, June	7	11
3	2018	April, May, June	4	6
4	2019	March, April, May, June	4	9

Newton et al. (1986), Nair (2007), and D'Cunha (2001) but they have not recorded its breeding in this region.

This species has been recorded in Kanger Valley National Park (KVNP) and adjoining Machkote Forest Range (MFR) of Bastar District. Both these forests have been classified as moist peninsular Sal (3C/C2e), southern moist mixed deciduous forest (3B/C2) and slightly moist teak forest (3B/C1c) categories by Champion & Seth (1968). The area is drained by the Indravati and Kolab /Sabri rivers, which are the major tributaries of river Godavari.

KVNP with an area 200 km² has an altitude of 338–781 m, is situated in Jagdalpur-Bastar districts of Chhattisgarh and came into existence in 1982. The Machkote range adjoins KVNP with similar landscape.

Although previous studies have documented the presence of species in KVNP, none has reported its breeding in the area. On 17 May 2018, we observed a pair soaring at Nagalsar (compartment 84) and alighted and perched on a branch of a Saja *Terminalia elliptica* tree at a height of approximately 18 m in a habitat with 60–70% canopy cover. Male mounted the female for a while, but actual copulation was not observed, subsequently the birds flew away.

On 22 June 2019, during the annual traditional hunting festival (*Paradh*) conducted in KVNP and MFR, local hunters obtained a juvenile of Jerdon's Baza collected from a nest in the Chinta Dongri Hills (18.762° N, 82.046° E, 650–720 m) of the Koleng range of KVNP. An

adult was observed feeding the chick at the nest which was situated approximately 16 m above ground in a mixed Sal Forest. The chick was characterized by a heavily streaked head and breast, darker spottier bands on the underparts and tail with four darker bands matched with description by Ali & Ripley (1987). The identification was confirmed by Dr Asad R. Rahmani.

The finding of a dead juvenile and a chick at a nest site in June 2019, confirms the first report on breeding by this species from Bastar Division, Chhattisgarh and central India as no previous studies have reported it. Breeding of the species has previously been reported from Kerala (Vishnudas 2007).

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Record of Siberian Rubythroat from the Palamau Region, Jharkhand



Siberian Rubythroat
in Palamau region of
Jharkhand, India.
© Ayush Kumar Singh.

Palamau District, located in the western part of the Chotanagpur Plateau, has historically lacked proper documentation of its avian diversity (Rawat 2013), primarily due to prolonged socio-political disturbances, especially the Naxalite insurgency, since the 1980s (Iqbal & Ilyas 2023). Nevertheless, the Chotanagpur region, with its mosaic of forests, grasslands, and plateau landscapes, represents an ecologically diverse zone that holds significant potential for avian biodiversity studies. Despite its importance, the region remains poorly explored ornithologically, thereby warranting systematic surveys to document its full avifaunal richness (Islam & Rahmani 2004; Chowdhury 2020). Moreover, certain areas may harbour high avian diversity

owing to their habitat heterogeneity and ecological significance, yet they continue to be underrepresented in biodiversity assessments because of limited field surveys and a lack of systematic documentation (Islam & Rahmani 2004).

On 15 March 2025, during the early spring season, a Siberian Rubythroat *Calliope calliope* was photographed by the second author in the Palamau region (24.1500° N, 84.2948° E; 298 m) at approximately 0700 h, near a small water pond on the ground. The individual was observed for about ten minutes at the same location, allowing for clear photographic documentation. Subsequently, the bird

disappeared and was not sighted again in the area. Morphologically, it exhibited a prominent white supercilium, a vivid red throat bordered by contrasting black and white, and light brown upperparts. These features clearly distinguish it from the Himalayan Rubythroat *Calliope pectoralis pectoralis*, which lacks the white sub-moustachial stripe and has grey, rather than brown, upperparts, and from the Chinese Rubythroat *Calliope pectoralis tschebaiewi*, which is grey above and characterised by distinct white tips and bases on the tail-features not observed in the individual recorded.

The Siberian Rubythroat breeds across the central Ural Mountains and Siberia, extending eastward to Anadyr, Kamchatka, the Commander Islands, and south to northern Mongolia, North Korea, northern Japan, the Kuril Islands, and parts of central China including northeastern Qinghai, southwestern Gansu, and northern Sichuan. As a long-distance migrant, it winters across southern and southeastern Asia, including Taiwan and the Philippines (Collar 2020). During migration, the species moves through Mongolia, China, Korea, and Japan; western populations are believed to initially move eastward to avoid major mountain ranges before turning south. In the eastern Himalayan foothills, the Siberian Rubythroat occurs as a passage migrant and winter visitor from September to April and may be observed at elevations up to 4,000 m (Ali & Ripley 1987; Grimmett et al. 2011; Collar 2020). Furthermore, in Jharkhand, this species has previously been sighted in Hazaribagh, c. 188 km from Palamau (Tiga 2024), c. 180 km from Ranchi (Kumar 2024), and from

East Singhbhum, c. 370 km (Pati 2024), and is reported as a winter migrant in the east Singhbhum region (Grimmett et al. 2011; SolB 2023). However, to date, there are no records of its occurrence in the Palamau region. Therefore, this observation on 15 March 2025 represents the first documented record of Siberian Rubythroat *Calliope calliope* for Palamau District, underscoring the need for further systematic avian surveys in this under-explored landscape.

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Errata

Ashtami K., A. Raj, C. D'Silva & Namratha (2026). Predator or Prey? Preliminary Observations on Shark Landings at Dhakke. MIN #9, In: Zoo's Print 41(6): 20–26. <https://zoosprint.org/index.php/zp/article/view/8166/7402>
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(i). The acknowledgement stating that Vishnu H. assisted with shark identification is incorrect and should be disregarded. The corrected species identifications presented below are based on comments and expert review provided by Praveen Rozario, Project associate at Marine Biology Regional Centre at Zoological Survey of India (ZSI). The authors regret these errors and any confusion they may have caused.

(ii). In page 25, Species 4 image, the species identified as *Rhizoprionodon acutus* (Milk shark) is incorrect. In all instances where “**Milk shark**” or *Rhizoprionodon acutus* is mentioned in the article (21–26 pp), replace it with “**Spadenose shark**” (*Scoliodon laticaudus*). In Table 1, page 22, the length at maturity is 38.3 cm for *Scoliodon laticaudus* (FishBase 2026f). As the measured total length (TL) is approximately 95 cm for *Scoliodon laticaudus*, it indicates that the Spadenose shark individual landed was an adult. To disregard the information on Length at Maturity and inferred stage of life for milk sharks in row numbered 6 in table 1, page 22.

(iii). Citation to be added in the reference section in page 26: FishBase (2026f). *Scoliodon laticaudus*. https://www.fishbase.se/summary/Scoliodon_laticaudus.html Accessed on 18.vii.2026).

To disregard the citation in the references: Fishbase (2026e). *Rhizoprionodon acutus*. https://www.fishbase.se/summary/Rhizoprionodon_acutus.html. Accessed on 17.iv.2026.

(iv). The species identified as *Iago omanensis* is incorrect throughout the article (21–26 pp). Based on available evidence, the specimen is more appropriately referred to as *Iago* cf. *mangalorensis*. However, due to unresolved taxonomic ambiguities within the genus, all references to “**Iago omanensis**” or “**Big-eye houndshark**” in the article should be replaced with “**Iago species**” or “**hound sharks**”, as appropriate.

(v). In ‘Species 2: *Carcharhinus amblyrhynchoideus*’ image caption on page 24, the common names “**Graceful shark/Grey reef shark**” are provided. The reference to Grey reef shark is incorrect and should not be considered.

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