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Evidential proofs of the existence of Indian pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*, Geoffroy, 1803) in Subarnarekha near Saldabar village area

Shwetadri Bhandari**Abstract**

The existence of the Indian Pangolins inside the deep, dense forest of Gobaria in Ajodhya Pahar from the local villagers of Ajodhya Pahar. When a study was conducted in the Kalimati Beat of the Bagmundi Range, I visited the village named Saldabar, where I found some holes in the ground which are seems to be the holes of the Indian Pangolins. These holes are measured and it is about 1 feet to 1 foot and 5 inches wide and long. I also find termite stack near the holes which is very strongly suggested that those holes are the holes of the Indian Pangolins. I also pointed out that the local peoples are trying to hide the existence of Pangolins in the area and they claim that they never see any animals like this ever in their area. But this is very unnatural as the existence of holes near the termite stack. It is true that the pangolins are nocturnal but is it possible that these pangolins are hidden to very local people of the area until we found it? Or more big things are related with this hiding? Things like illegal poaching and illegal wildlife trades of the Indian Pangolins. It is known to all that Pangolins are the most trafficked animal in the world. This finding opens a great window for new research works in Ajodhya Pahar.

Keywords: Indian pangolins, sign survey, endemic, photographic evidences

Introduction

Indian Pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*; family: Manidae, order: Pholidota), is one of the eight living species of pangolins of the world. The Indian Pangolins are also known as thick-tailed pangolin or scaly anteater. It has large overlapping scales on its body which act as armor. They are solitary, shy, slow moving, nocturnal mammal which is 84 to 122 centimeters long from head to tail, the tail usually being 33 to 47 centimeters long and weighs 10 to 16 kg. Females are generally smaller than the males and have one pair of mammae. The pangolin possesses a cone shaped head with small, dark eyes and a long muzzle with a nose pad similar in color, or darker than, it's pinkish-brown skin. It has powerful limbs, tipped with sharp, clawed digits. It is an almost exclusive insectivore and principally subsists on ants and termites, which it catches with its long, adopted, sticky tongue. The pangolin has no teeth, but has strong stomach muscles to aid in digestion. The most noticeable characteristic of the pangolin is its massive, scaled armor, which covers its upper face and its whole body with the exception of the belly and the inside of the legs. These protective scales are rigid and made of keratin. It has 160 to 200 scales in total, about 40 to 46% of which are located on the tail. The scales make up about one-fourth to one third of the total body mass of this species.

In India, this species is widely distributed from the plains and lower hills south of the Himalayas to extreme southern India (Tikader 1983). There are historical records from Kerala and Kanyakumari; Tamil Nadu; Delhi; Madhya Pradesh (Gwalior and Achanakur Wildlife Sanctuaries, Chambal Nation Park); Gujarat (Gir National Park); Rajasthan (Keolodeo Ghana Wildlife Sanctuary); Orissa including Kotgarh and Kuldiha Wildlife Sanctuaries and the Sunabedh Plateau, while Mishra and Panda (2012) report its presence in 14 to 30 districts here based on animals that have been rescued, as well as the Himalayan foothills of Uttar Pradesh (CITES 2000). Srinivasulu and Srinivasulu (2012) states this species also occurs in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Uttarakhand.

The Indian pangolin is a poorly known species. Little effort has been devoted to understanding its biology, ecology and behavior, perhaps due to nocturnal and secretive habit of the species. Available published information on Indian pangolin is primarily from natural history observations, rescue reports, reports of illegal trade and captive studies.

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Many practical questions remain unanswered because of incomplete information on ecological and behavioral biology of the species. It is known that these species is distributed throughout India, still their habitats are not still specified. No proper research article of the distribution of this species in West Bengal has been published properly.

Methodology

This work is done by completely secondary survey work. It is basically a very beginner level of scientific study which is mainly focused on the sign survey method. We focus on the ground holes which are the hiding places of the Pangolins. We also focus on the termite stacks which are the main food source of the Indian Pangolins. No proper primary evidence of the existence of the Indian Pangolin has been used in this study.

Results

While working in the Elephant Corridor Mapping Project in Purulia Division Forest Department, I found many sighting reports of the Indian Pangolin throughout Purulia Division Forest Department. But no circumstantial evidence found about the Indian Pangolins in the areas. While continuing the Elephant Corridor Mapping work in the Kalimati beat area of the Baghmundi Range of the Purulia Division Forest Department I found five holes with in hundred meter of range. These holes are varies from about 1 feet to 1 feet 5 inches wide and 1 feet to 1 feet 2 inches in length. More noticeably we have found multiple termite stacks within three hundred meters of radius from the suspected holes.

The holes we have found in the Saldabar Village area which is very near to the Subarnarekha River.

Here are some pictures of the holes with GPS co-ordinates.



Fig 1: Suspected Pangolin Holes at Saldabar Village



Fig 2: Suspected Pangolin Holes at Saldabar Village



Fig 3: Suspected Pangolin Holes at Saldabar Village

Discussion

In the very beginning I must conclude that this work is not a complete work and to get any conclusion of this work, much more study needed. But this work gives us a preliminary idea of the existence of the Indian Pangolins in Purulia and its relation with the local people and its habitat utilization in the wild. Let me discuss about the outcome of the study below:

1. Indian Pangolin holes are found in the Saldabar Village area which is very near to the River Subarnarekha; this gives us a very clear idea of the population density of this species in this area as we do found multiple holes in various areas of the village.
2. The existence of the termite stack is suggesting that there is a lot of food availability for the species in the area and this species can live here very easily as the habitat is very much suitable for sustaining.
3. This finding can lead us to further Distribution and behavioral study of the Indian Pangolins.
4. One very interesting outcome we get in this study is that, the local people are denying about the existence of this species in this area. Even when we do show some pictures of Pangolins they just ignored about the sightings. But judging by the reaction of the villagers. I assume there is something very fishy regarding the response of the villagers about this species.
5. Since Pangolins are the most trafficked animal of the world it can be possible that trafficking do occurs from these areas too.
6. This finding opens a huge window for new research studies on the Indian Pangolins in Ajodhya Pahar.

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