

THE TIBETAN WOLF *CANIS LUPUS CHANCO* GRAY (MAMMALIA: CARNIVORA: CANIDAE) IN NORTHEASTERN INDIA WITH A RECENT SIGHTING FROM NORTHERN SIKKIM, INDIA

Anwaruddin Choudhury

The Rhino Foundation for Nature in North East India, House No.7, Islampur Road, near Nehru Stadium, Guwahati, Assam 781007, India acbadru56@gmail.com

The Tibetan Wolf *Canis lupus chanco* Gray is a relatively rare subspecies of the wolf *C. lupus* occurring in the Tibetan Plateau in China and adjacent areas of India, Nepal and Bhutan. This subspecies differs from the subspecies *C. l. pallipes* that occurs widely in the warmer plains of India in having a long and dense winter coat. Although variable, the normal colour is buff-brown, light brown or grey-brown, grizzled with some black hairs. Some individuals may have blackish coats. In the field, it often looks slightly larger than the *pallipes*, owing to its long and denser winter coat. In northeastern (NE) India, its presence has been confirmed only in Sikkim with unconfirmed reports from Arunachal Pradesh (Choudhury 2013). In Arunachal, it has occasionally been reported from near the India-China border. It is reported from Mehao Wildlife Sanctuary (A. Sen pers. comm. 1994) and Thingbu area of Tawang District

(Singh 1991). The reports from Gaoligongshan in China (Ma et al. 1994) also indicate its possible occurrence in Arunachal Pradesh. Although known from Sikkim, there are only few locality records and photographic records are also not easily available. The main range of the wolf in Sikkim is in the high elevation areas of the North, East and West districts. Avasthe & Jha (1999) also listed Maenam Wildlife Sanctuary in South Sikkim District as a site of occurrence of *C. l. chanco*, which, however, needs further corroboration as the habitat and elevation factors do not favour its presence. Sathyakumar et al. (2011) recorded it in Kangchendzonga National Park above 4000m elevation. In northern West Bengal there is no record but a stray animal might have visited the Phalut–Sandakphu areas.

Since it is a rare taxon with fewer sighting records from Sikkim, I report an observation made recently while on a visit to the state as Election Observer. We left Chaten Army camp where I stayed for the night before dawn and passed through Lachen and Thangu towards the Cold Desert of northern Sikkim on 17 April 2014. We left Thangu at 06:36hr and proceeded northwards. The vehicle was moving at a slow speed so that we could observe the surroundings and stop immediately if anything interesting was sighted. At around 07:10hr,



ISSN 0974-7907 (Online)
ISSN 0974-7893 (Print)

OPEN ACCESS



NOT EVALUATED	DATA DEFICIENT		NEAR THREATENED	VULNERABLE	ENDANGERED	CRITICALLY ENDANGERED	EXTINCT IN THE WILD	EXTINCT
NE	DD		LC	NT	VU	EN	CR	EW

Canis lupus chanco
Tibetan Wolf



DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11609/JoTT.o4206.7475-6> | **ZooBank:** urn:lsid:zoobank.org:pub:1EA2AB83-BFB2-4FE6-B79C-2A8CE70D6EDC

Editor: Mewa Singh, University of Mysore, Mysuru, India.

Date of publication: 26 June 2015 (online & print)

Manuscript details: Ms # o4206 | Received o3 January 2015 | Final received 08 May 2015 | Finally accepted 28 May 2015

Citation: Choudhury, A. (2015). The Tibetan Wolf *Canis lupus chanco* Gray (Mammalia: Carnivora: Canidae) in northeastern India with a recent sighting from northern Sikkim, India. *Journal of Threatened Taxa* 7(8): 7475–7476; <http://dx.doi.org/10.11609/JoTT.o4206.7475-6>

Copyright: © Choudhury 2015. Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. JoTT allows unrestricted use of this article in any medium, reproduction and distribution by providing adequate credit to the authors and the source of publication.

Funding: None.

Competing interests: The author declares no competing interests.

Acknowledgements: I thank K.N. Bhar of the Election Commission, C. Bhutia (DC, West District), the DC, North District and SDM of Chungthang, officials of Chaten Army Camp, Sanjay Pradhan of Pelling, Tsering Doma Lepcha of Pemayangtse, Santa Bir Darnal, Gurinder and Avin.





Image 1. Tibetan wolf *Canis lupus chanco* in northern Sikkim

I noticed the rear of a 'cattle or yak-like' animal standing motionless among the rocks very close to the road. A lone animal at that place made me to stop the vehicle for enquiry. On seeing the vehicle stopped and a door being opened, the animal moved and crossed the road just 12–15 metres ahead of me where I could see it fully - a Tibetan Wolf! The site is 13km from Thangu at 4,250m elevation towards Gyagong or Gogong in North Sikkim District (27°57'N & 88°30'E). I was a bit nervous as my camera was not ready and I was not expecting a rare animal such as this crossing the road so close. Anyway I got my camera ready and with a 150–500 mm tele zoom,

I immediately clicked 37 frames when the animal was about 50m away and continued till it was about 200m away. Enroute it also crossed the Teesta River. Although it continued moving it did not panic as such, hence I could take the photos (Image 1). It also stopped after a short movement and looked back, it repeated this several times. It then climbed the slopes of the Great Himalaya (towards the north is the edge of the Cold Desert). The habitat type was alpine scrub.

While coming down from the plateau, I saw a few free-ranging dogs chasing a Tibetan Woolly Hare *Lepus oiostolus*. These dogs seemed to be an apparent threat to the fauna of that small plateau which is within India. The wolf might be facing competition from these feral animals as they reportedly prey upon the young of Bharal *Pseudois nayaur* and other ungulates, and of course the rodents such as marmots and pikas.

References

- Choudhury, A.U. (2013).** *The Mammals of North East India*. Gibbon Books and The Rhino Foundation for nature in NE India, with support from Forestry Bureau (COA), Taiwan. Guwahati, India, 432pp.
- Ma, S., L. Han & D. Lan (1994).** *Bird and Mammal Resources and Nature Conservation in the Gaoligongshan Region, Yunnan Province, People's Republic of China*. Kunming Institute of Zoology, Kunming, Yunnan, China.
- Singh, P. (1991).** A preliminary faunal survey in Thingbu circle, Towang District, Arunachal Pradesh. *Arunachal Forest News* 9(1): 13–22.
- Avasthe, R. & A. Jha (1999).** *Mammals of Sikkim*. WWF-India Sikkim Field Office, Gangtok, India, 97pp.
- Sathyakumar, S., T. Bashir, T. Bhattacharya & L. Poudyal (2011).** Assessing mammal distribution and abundance in intricate eastern Himalayan habitats of Khangchendzonga, Sikkim, India. *Mammalia* 75(3): 257–268; <http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/mamm.2011.023>

