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NOTE

ELUSIVE, RARE AND SOFT: A NEW SITE RECORD OF LEITH'S SOFTSHELL TURTLE *NILSSONIA LEITHII* (REPTILIA: TESTUDINES: TRIONYCHIDAE) FROM BHADRA TIGER RESERVE, KARNATAKA, INDIA

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Leith's Softshell Turtle *Nilssonia leithii* (Gray, 1872) is a large freshwater turtle with a carapace length growing up to 720–1,000 mm. Being rare within its range, it occurs in most rivers and reservoirs of peninsular India, replacing the Indian Softshell Turtle *Nilssonia gangetica* of northern India (Sirsi 2010; Das et al. 2014). Except for the projected native distribution by Das et al. (2014) using GIS-defined hydrologic unit compartments, there have been no explicit records of *N. leithii*'s presence from Bhadra River flowing through Bhadra Tiger Reserve. This makes our sighting of *N. leithii*'s hatchling, the first-ever record of its presence, and indirect evidence of its nesting along the banks of Bhadra River within Bhadra Tiger Reserve (Figure 1). Based on the review conducted by Das et al. (2014) and us, our record is the third ever documented record of Leith's Softshell Turtle's hatching from the wild, with previous records from Moyar River in Tamil Nadu (Das et al. 2014) and Chalakudy River in Kerala (Nameer et al. 2007), over 25 and 12 years ago, respectively.

The individual that we observed, was a hatchling, with an approximate carapace length of 6cm (Image 1a). It was found on 7 July 2019 at 14:46h inside a puddle on a forest road that runs beside the Bhadra River, within the tiger reserve (13.435°N, 75.510°E). The carapace was greyish-green in colour with prominent vermiculation,

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running from top to bottom. The carapace also contained four eye-like concentric circular spots, with a blackish core surrounded by a reddish circle (Image 1b). The spots on the carapace were arranged as three in one row near the middle of the carapace and one near the bottom. The head of the hatchling was greenish with black streaks running from eye to the neck. The corner of the mouth was found to have yellow patches on either side (Image 1a). We observed the hatchling for over 10 minutes and, released it into the Bhadra River.

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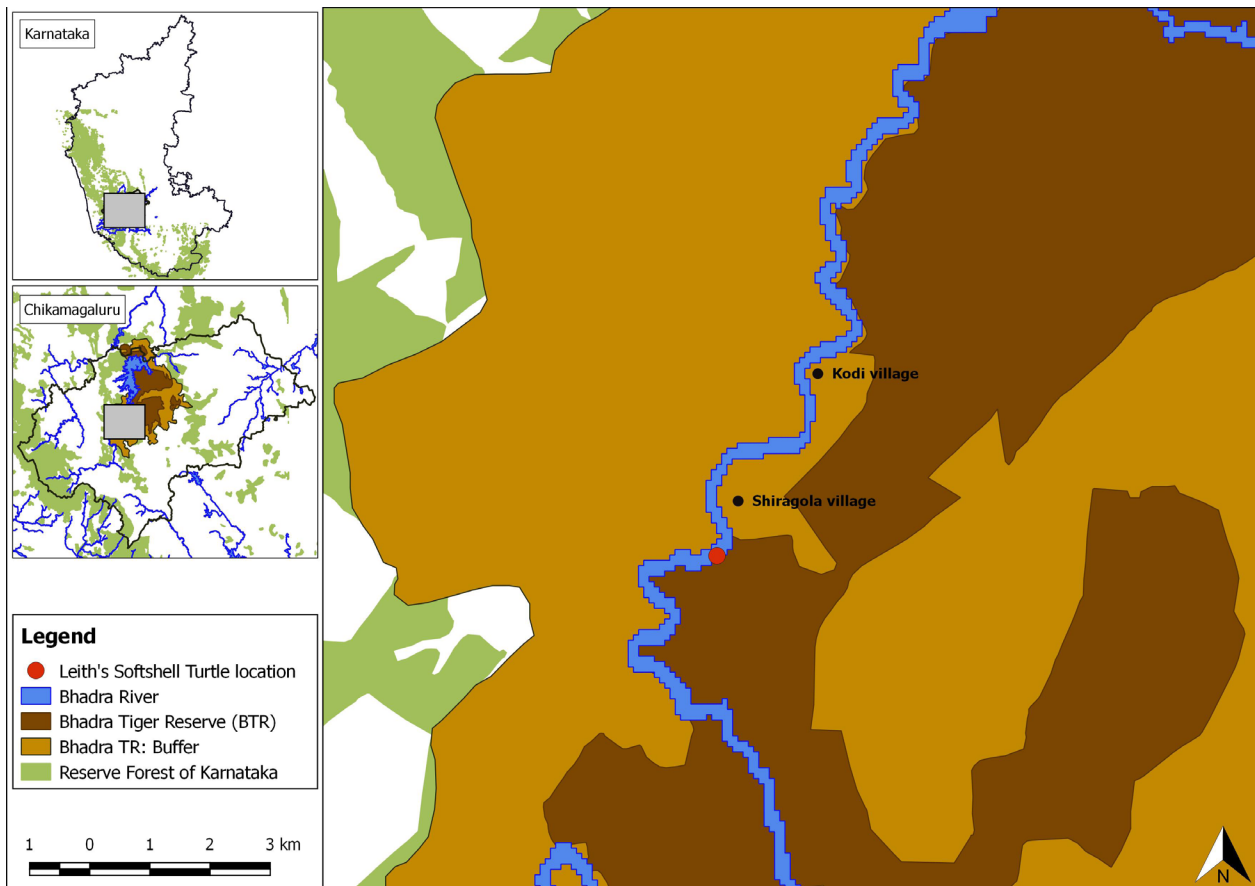


Figure 1. Location where the Leith's Softshell Turtle *Nilssonia leithii* was observed in Bhadra Tiger Reserve.



Image 1a. The observed Leith's Softshell Turtle *Nilssonia leithii* showing the yellow patch at the end of its mouth, and a reference for its size.

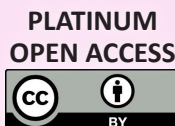


Image 1b. Picture of the observed Lieth's Softshell Turtle *Nilssonina leithii* showing the carapace containing four eye-like concentric circular spots, with a blackish core surrounded by a reddish circle.

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