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Cover: *Geodorum laxiflorum* Griff.—inflorescence (Orchidaceae) © Ashish Ravindra Bhojwar.



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NOTE

First photographic evidence of Asiatic Black Bear *Ursus thibetanus* in Kaziranga Tiger Reserve, India

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The Asiatic Black Bear *Ursus thibetanus*, also commonly known as the Himalayan Black Bear and sometimes known as ‘Moon Bear’ due to the presence of a characteristic crescent shaped white mark on the upper portion of the chest. It is listed as ‘Vulnerable’ in the Red Data Book (Garshelis & Steinmetz 2020), in Appendix I of CITES in India since 1990 and in Schedule I of the Indian Wild Life (Protection) Act (as amended in 2006). The Asiatic Black Bear occupies a variety of forested habitats, both broad-leaf and coniferous, from near sea level to an elevation up to 4,300 m (Sathyakumar et al. 2013). It is distributed in southern and eastern Asia from Afghanistan and Baluchistan Province of Iran, east through Indo-China, much of China, Korea, Japan, and Taiwan (Cowan 1972; Servheen 1990). In India, the bear is distributed throughout the Himalaya (Sathyakumar 2001) from the north-west (Jammu and Kashmir,

Himachal Pradesh) to the east (Arunachal Pradesh) and in the hills of the other northeastern states (Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura, Nagaland, and Manipur) (Sathyakumar 2006; Sathyakumar & Choudhury 2007; Choudhury 2013). Literature suggests that its range overlaps with that of the Sloth Bear below 1,200 m, the Himalayan Brown Bear above 3,000 m (Prater 1980), and in northeastern India with the Sun Bear (Choudhury 1997a,b). In India, the bear is reported to occur in 83 protected areas and 93 other localities (Sathyakumar & Choudhury 2007).

Kaziranga Tiger Reserve (KTR) is located in the flood plain of the Brahmaputra River, on the foot hills of Karbi Anglong district, spread across the civil districts of Golaghat, Nagaon, Sonitpur, and Biswanath (Figure 1). The Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong landscape consists of the Karbi plateau of Karbi Anglong to the south and the

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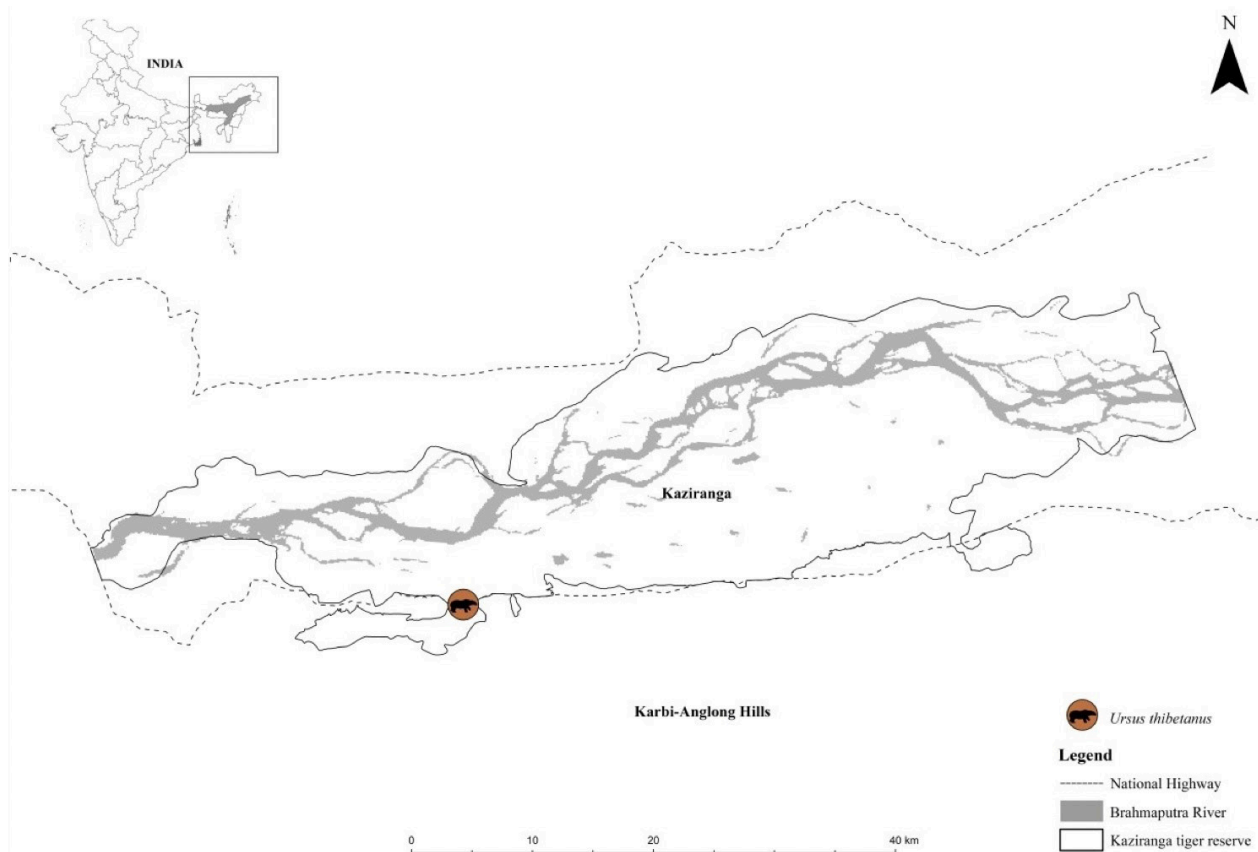


Figure 1. Map showing Kaziranga Tiger Reserve with the location of photo-captured Asiatic Black Bear.

Brahmaputra River to the north in Assam. The hills in Karbi Anglong are part of the Shillong plateau having an average elevation of 300–400 m. The highest peak called ‘Singhason Peak’ is 1,360 m high located in East Karbi Anglong. The Karbi Anglong forests and grasslands of Kaziranga Tiger Reserve formed one contiguous unit of ideal wildlife habitat.

We carried out camera trap sampling involving several camera traps deployed in a manner so that at least one station falls on each (2 x 2) km² grid, as a part of the study to determine the functionality of corridors present in the Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong Landscape. We used infrared Cuddeback (Model: H1453) camera traps during the study.

In 2018, photographs of two rescued cubs from a village called Dokmoka by Karbi Anglong Forest Department were published in the official website of Wildlife Trust of India. In this study, we report, the first photographic evidence of Asiatic Black Bear in the wild of Kaziranga Tiger Reserve. The first deployment of camera traps was started on February 2021 and subsequently the second deployment of camera traps was carried out on May 2021. During this period a single photograph



Image 1. Camera trap image of Asiatic Black Bear captured on 12 May 2021 in the southern part of Kaziranga Tiger Reserve, India.

of the species was captured on 12 May 2021 at 2124 h (Image 1). The species was photo-captured at an elevation of 75 m and the location falls under the Bagser Reserve Forest (buffer of Kaziranga National Park). The

location also falls in the junction of Amguri-Kanchanjuri corridor. The habitat was moist mixed deciduous with Teak *Tectona grandis* as the dominant species. The location is approximately 275 m away from the National Highway 37. The proximity of human settlement is about 300 m from the point; hence, it has experienced high human intervention in terms of cutting and lopping of fresh timbers and cane sticks in the area.

Literatures on the Asiatic Black Bear from this landscape are very limited. Choudhury (1997a,b) noted the presence of the species in the foothills and hills of Assam, mostly in the Karbi, NC hills and Cachar district. It was very much common in the eastern Karbi Anglong and Barail Range. Lahan & Sonowal (1973) reported a single record from Kaziranga.

Due to hunting and poaching, the population has decreased globally over the years. Hunting/ poaching of all species of bears is going on at different scales in all the states of northeastern India, especially outside the protected areas for meat (Choudhury & Rengma 2005). In the hilly areas of the region such as Nagaland, Mizoram, parts of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur, the village hunters/poachers often keep the skulls as display on their walls (Choudhury 2013). Thus, the presence of the Asiatic Black Bear needs more systematic surveys in the tiger reserve along with the southern landscape.

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