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Cover: Emperor Tamarin *Saguinus imperator*: a look into a better world through the mustache lens – mixed media illustration. © Maya Santhanakrishnan.

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NOTE

First photographic evidence of Mainland Serow *Capricornis sumatraensis thar* (Bechstein, 1799) in Raimona National Park, Assam, India

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The Mainland Serow *Capricornis sumatraensis thar* is present across various habitats extending from the Himalayas on the Indian subcontinent to southern China, mainland southeastern Asia, and Sumatra (Groves & Grubb 2011; Choudhury 2013; Mori et al. 2019). Despite their widespread distribution, studies showed that Mainland Serow is highly restricted to rugged terrains between the mid- to high-elevation ranges between 200 to >2,000 m (Carr et al. 2023) and avoids human settlements (Phan et al. 2019). Listed as 'Vulnerable' by the IUCN Red List (Phan et al. 2020), the species' populations are fragmented, isolated, and rapidly declining due to poaching, habitat destruction, and habitat loss. The lack of reliable data on this species' abundance and distribution makes it difficult to implement effective conservation actions to ensure long-term survival (Phan et al. 2020; Carr et al. 2023). In the Indian subcontinent, Mainland Serow is widely distributed across community forests and protected areas of India, Nepal, Bhutan, and Myanmar, from 100 m (Choudhury 2013) up to an elevation of 3,500 m (Phan et al. 2020). In Bhutan, the species is documented both

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Image 1. Mainland Serow *Capricornis sumatraensis thar* was photo-captured in the Ripu-Chirang Forest Complex (presently Raimona National Park), Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), Assam, India (29 December 2020) at an elevation of 96 m. © Department of Environment and Forests, BTC, and Aaranyak.

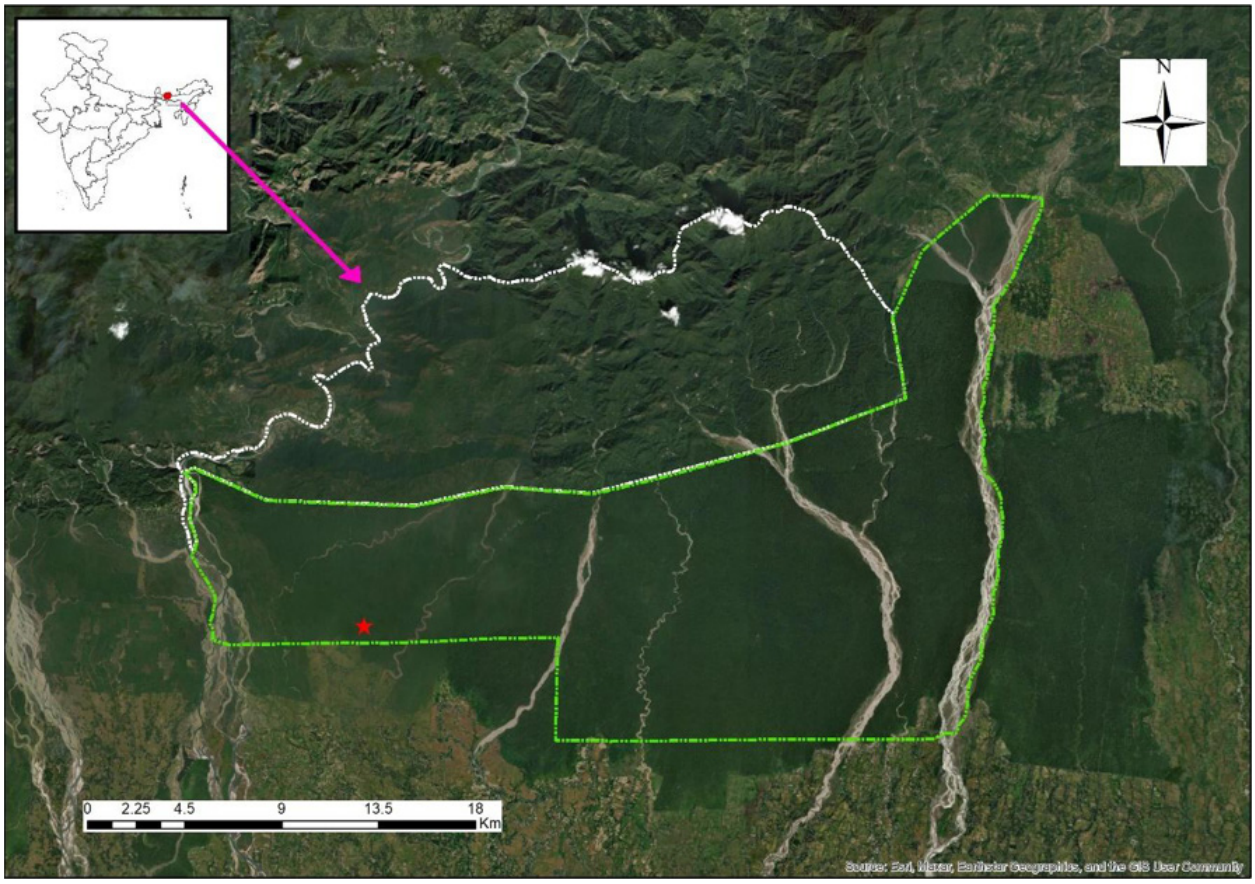

Image 2. The map shows the photo-captured location of Mainland Serow *Capricornis sumatraensis thar* in Raimona National Park located in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) of Assam, India (29 December 2020).

in non-protected areas (e.g., Lamai Goempa Research Preserve of central Bhutan (Dhendup et al. 2019) and in protected areas (e.g., Royal Manas National Park, Phibsoo Wildlife Sanctuary and Jomotsangkha Wildlife Sanctuary (Ahmed et al. 2016, 2019; DoFPS 2023), that share contiguous forest with India, in the Transboundary Manas Conservation Area (TraMCA). In India, the species is continuously distributed across the Himalaya

from Jammu & Kashmir to Arunachal Pradesh's Mishmi Hills (Roy et al. 2020; Ahmad & Gopi 2024).

This study presents a photographic record of the species from a newly declared protected area in western Assam. The Assam government declared the area a national park on 08 June 2021. The area was severely impacted by ethnopolitical violence for nearly three decades, beginning in the late 1980s, until peace was restored with the declaration of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTR) in 2020. The present camera trapping survey was carried out between 06 December 2020 and 05 January 2021 in Ripu Reserve Forest (presently Raimona National Park (RNP), contiguous with Phibsoo Wildlife Sanctuary of Bhutan, and is located in the western end of the India-Bhutan Manas Transboundary Conservation Area (TraMCA).

With the camera trapping effort of 2,542 trap-days using white flash passive Panthera (New York, USA) V6 digital camera traps, Mainland Serow was recorded in two independent events on 29 December 2020 at 0912 h and 1346 h, respectively, at an elevation of 96 m (Image 1), near Ganda Bajrum Anti-poaching camp (26.672N & 89.944E) located in the Western Range (Raimona) of RNP (Image 2). Ganda Bajrum Anti-poaching camp is just 1 km apart from the nearest settlements. This is the first photographic evidence of Mainland Serow in the RNP.

Mainland Serow is widely distributed in the neighbouring Phibsoo Wildlife Sanctuary (Tenzin et al. 2022) and Royal Manas National Park (Ahmed et al. 2016) of Bhutan, which may support population recovery in RNP. Contrary to previous records, the current photographic evidence of Mainland Serow is likely the lowest elevation record from the Indian sub-continent and is close to human settlements, suggesting that more studies on habitat associations are necessary. Previously, the species was recorded between the elevation of 100–300 m in Assam (Choudhury 2003). However, there are no studies on the species' habitat requirements in this region, which is crucial for considering species-specific conservation actions. Occasional poaching for bushmeat and habitat alteration due to logging during the ethnopolitical violence are the primary conservation concerns of the RNP. With the government now protecting the park, future conservation efforts should consider securing and recovering the species' population and restoration of the degraded habitats.

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