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43/2 Varadarajulu Nagar, 5th Street West, Ganapathy, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu 641006, India
Registered Office: 3A2 Varadarajulu Nagar, FCI Road, Ganapathy, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu 641006, India
Ph: +91 9385339863 | www.threatenedtaxa.org
Email: sanjay@threatenedtaxa.org

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



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

Dipankar Lahkar¹ , Mohammad Firoz Ahmed² , Bhanu Sinha³ , Pranjal Talukdar⁴ ,
Biswajit Basumatary⁵ , Tunu Basumatary⁶ , Ramie H. Begum⁷ , Nibir Medhi⁸ , Nitul Kalita⁹
& Abishek Harihar¹⁰

^{1,2,8,9} Aaranyak, 13, Tayab Ali Bi-lane, Bishnu Rabha Path, Guwahati, Assam 781028, India.

^{3,4,5} Kachugaon Forest Division, Forest Department of Assam, Government of Assam, Assam 783350, India.

⁶ Green Forest Conservation, Kachugaon, Bodoland Territorial Council, Assam 783360, India.

⁷ Department of Life Science and Bioinformatics, Assam University (Diphu campus), Diphu, Karbi Anglong, Assam 782462, India.

¹⁰ Panthera, 8 West 40th Street, 18th Floor, New York, NY 10018, USA.

¹⁰ Nature Conservation Foundation, 1311, “Amritha”, 12th Main, Vijayanagar 1st Stage, Mysore, Karnataka 570017, India.

¹ dipankar.lahkar@gmail.com (corresponding author), ² mfa.aaranyak@gmail.com, ³ sinhafor@gmail.com, ⁴ talukdar.pranjal@gmail.com,

⁵ biswajitbasumatary312@gmail.com, ⁶ tunubasu7@gmail.com, ⁷ ani.ara73@gmail.com, ⁸ nibirmedhi03@gmail.com,

⁹ nitulkalita10@gmail.com, ¹⁰ harihar.abishek@gmail.com

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.

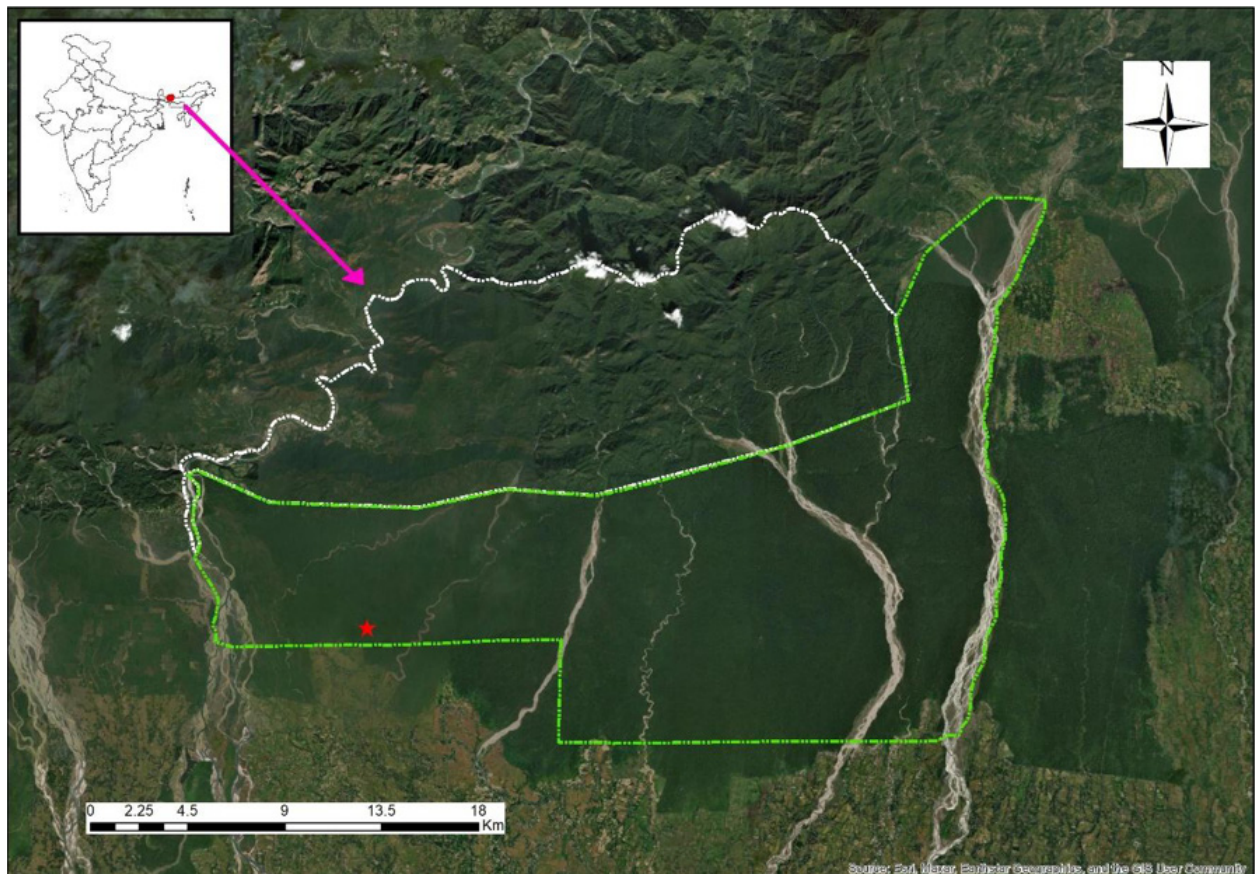


Image 2. The map shows the photo-captured location of Mainland Serow *Capricornis sumatraensis thar* in Raimona National Park located in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) of Assam, India (29 December 2020).

in non-protected areas (e.g., Lamai Goemba 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 ethno-political 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 ethno-political 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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Dr. S.S. Talmale, Zoological Survey of India, Pune, Maharashtra, India
Prof. Karan Bahadur Shah, Budhanilakantha Municipality, Kathmandu, Nepal
Dr. Susan Cheyne, Borneo Nature Foundation International, Palangkaraja, Indonesia
Dr. Hemanta Kafley, Wildlife Sciences, Tarleton State University, Texas, USA

Other Disciplines

Dr. Aniruddha Belsare, Columbia MO 65203, USA (Veterinary)
Dr. Mandar S. Paingankar, University of Pune, Pune, Maharashtra, India (Molecular)
Dr. Jack Tordoff, Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, Arlington, USA (Communities)
Dr. Ulrike Streicher, University of Oregon, Eugene, USA (Veterinary)
Dr. Hari Balasubramanian, EcoAdvisors, Nova Scotia, Canada (Communities)
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Dr. L.D. Singla, Guru Angad Dev Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, Ludhiana, India
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ravi@threatenedtaxa.org

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