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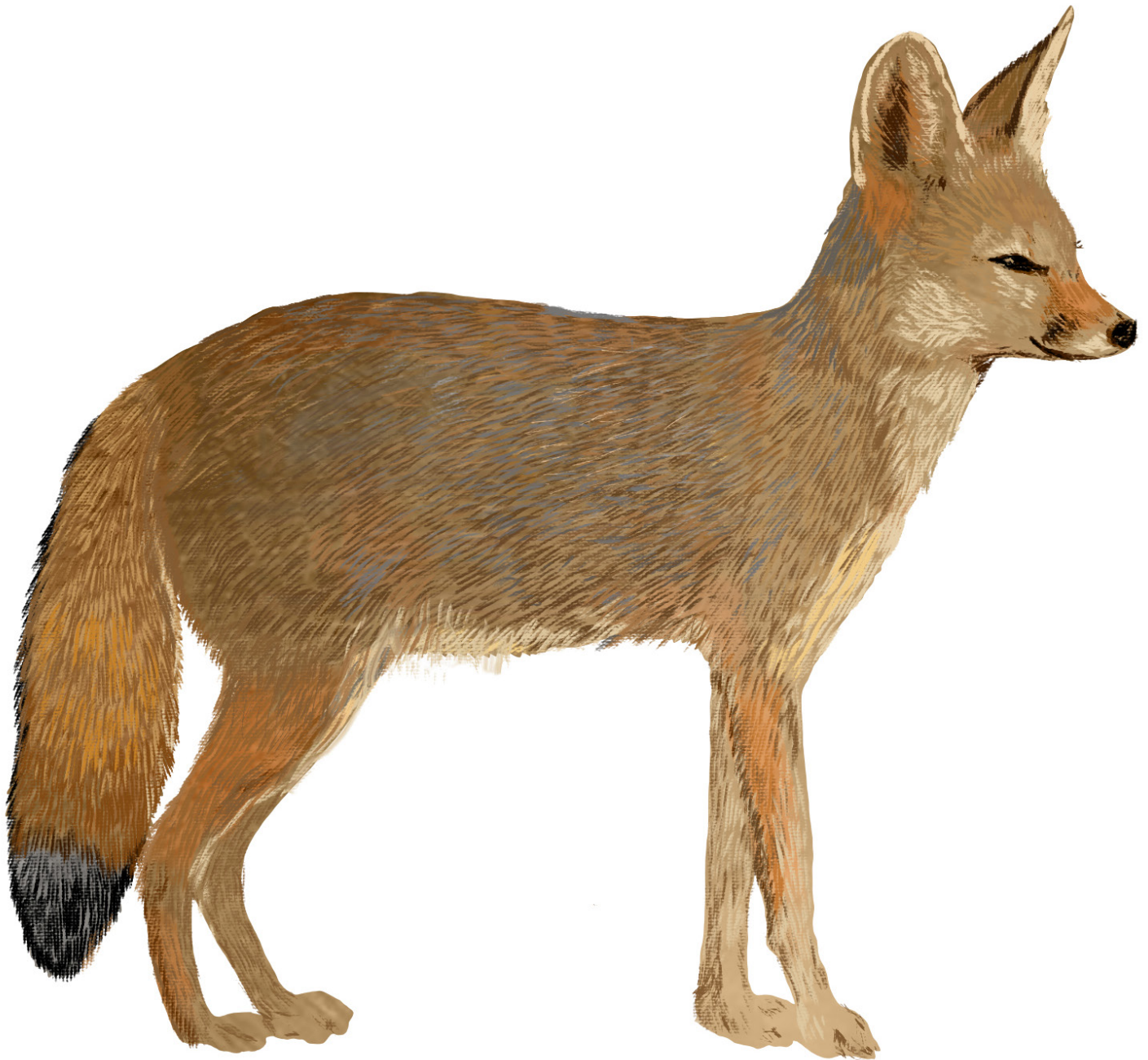
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Cover: Bengal Fox *Vulpes bengalensis*—digital illustration. © Alagu Raj.



## First photographic record of the Red Giant Gliding Squirrel *Petaurista petaurista* Pallas, 1766 (Mammalia: Rodentia: Sciuridae) from Sattal, Uttarakhand, India

Hiranmoy Chetia<sup>1</sup> , Jayant Gupta<sup>2</sup> & Murali Krishna Chatakonda<sup>3</sup>

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Globally, there are 45 recognised species of gliding squirrels classified within 15 genera. The majority (14 genera and 42 species) are found in Eurasia, with a particular concentration in southeastern Asia (Thorington & Hoffmann 2005). In India, 17 species of gliding squirrels have been documented to date (Koli et al. 2013; Sharma & Sharma 2013; Koli 2015; Datta & Nandini 2015; Krishna et al. 2016; Pal et al. 2019). These are primarily found in the Himalayan and northeastern regions, with only two species, the Indian Giant Gliding Squirrel *Petaurista philippensis* and the Travancore Gliding Squirrel *Petinomys fuscocapillus*, inhabiting the Western Ghats (Datta & Nandini 2015). Red Giant Gliding Squirrel *Petaurista petaurista* (RGGs in the later section) is a large, nocturnal folivore, classified as 'Least Concern' by the IUCN Red List (Duckworth 2016). These arboreal squirrels occupy a wide variety of forest habitats across northern South Asia, southern China, and southeastern Asia. Records of their presence in India span Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Sikkim, Manipur, Jammu & Kashmir, and Uttarakhand (Choudhury 2013; Duckworth 2016). Their altitudinal range typically falls between 30 and 3,100 m (Molur et al. 2005; Choudhury

2013). Primarily folivorous, RGGs exhibit a diverse diet that includes seeds, fruits, flowers, buds, bark, and lichen (Krishna 2016). They are known to occasionally construct leaf nests and utilise tree cavities and caves for nesting (Krishna et al. 2019). Although this species was reported earlier from other parts of Uttarakhand (Pal et al. 2021), the present communication is the first reporting of RGGs from Sattal with photographic evidence, which is under Bhowali Forest Region of Nainital District, Uttarakhand.

Sattal is a place near the city of Bhimtal in the Nainital district (29.3375°N, 79.5333°E) of the Kumaon region in Uttarakhand state situated at an altitude of 1,370 m (Image 1). The area has an interconnected group of seven lakes, viz.: Garud Tal, Naldamyanti Tal, Hanuman Tal, Sita Tal, Ram Tal, Laxman Tal, and Sukha Tal (Choudhary et al. 2009). The area is covered with dense coniferous trees like oak and pine.

We spotted three RGGs on two oak trees at two different locations (*Quercus* sp.) (Image 2a,b) while travelling along a trail in the forest near Garud Kund, ~1.5 km from the Sattal Lake using Energizer Pro 260 headlamps, Fenix C7 flashlight and binoculars (Model:

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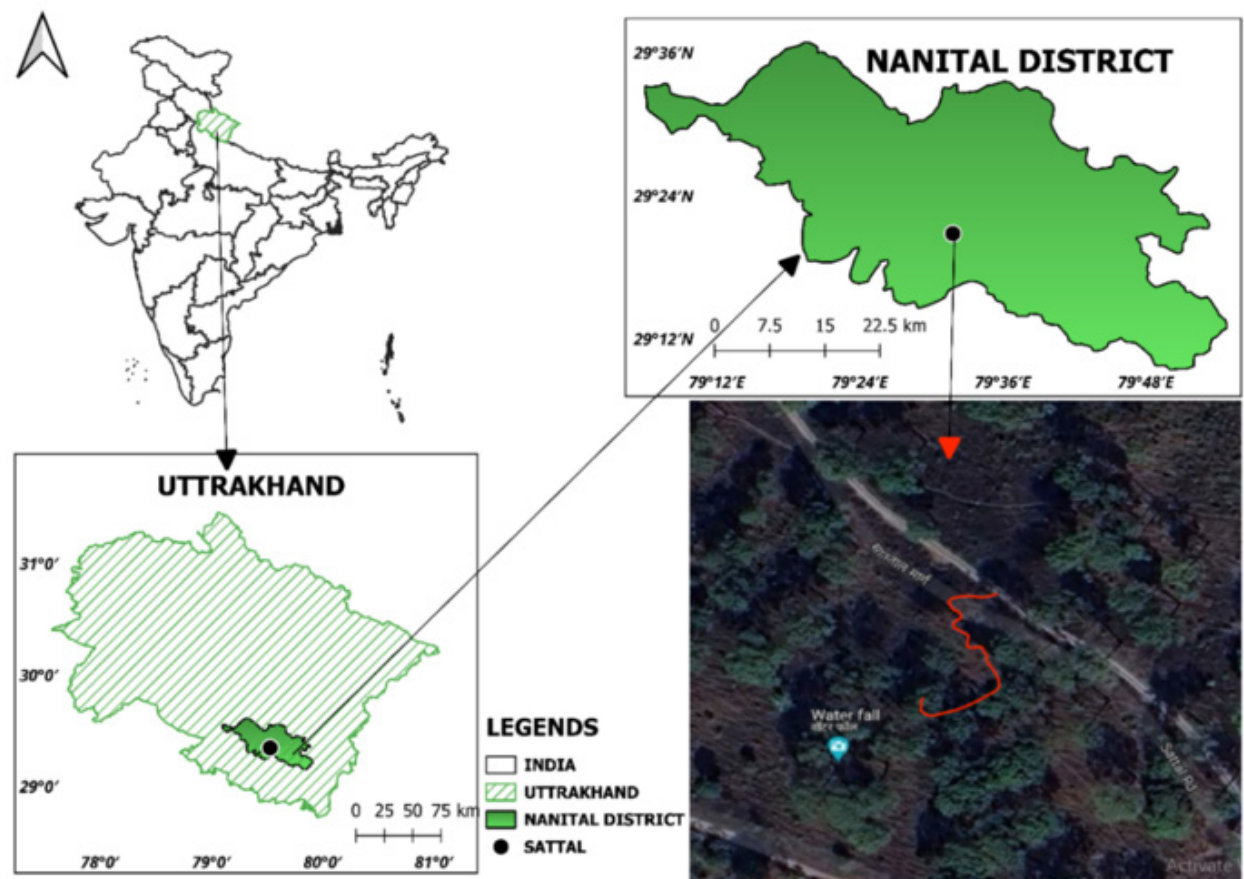


Image 1. Location of Sattal, Nainital (Uttarakhand) along with survey trail.

Solognac Wildlife Binoculars 100, 10 x 42) on 28 March 2024, between 1900–2200 h. We photographed them using a Nikon D500 camera. The first two individuals were recorded at around 1957 h and the other one was recorded at 2100 h. The distance between the two locations was ~700 m. The dorsal colour of the squirrel was reddish-brown with light orangish hair at the base of the patagium. The ventral surface was greyish-white. From the body colouration, it was identified as *Petaurista petaurista albiventer* with the help of standard literature (Thorington et al. 2012). At the time of sighting, the squirrels were actively feeding on tree leaves.

In addition to RGGs, we also sighted Northern Red Muntjak *Muntiacus vaginalis*, Sambar Deer *Rusa unicolor*, Himalayan Goral *Naemorhedus goral*, Yellow-throated Marten *Martes flavigula*, Himalayan Langur *Semnopithecus schistaceus*, and Rhesus Macaque *Macaca mulatta*. We observed forest fires at multiple sites.

Though the observed site falls near the known distribution of RGGs as per the IUCN Red List, the

species was not recorded earlier from the present study site. In the Nainital District, the closest location to our current study site, where the species was previously recorded, is about 40 km away. This observation provides valuable insight into the distribution pattern of the species within Uttarakhand. This is crucial for developing effective conservation strategies, as it allows us to identify key habitats and areas that require protection. Consequently, this information will significantly contribute to the species' long-term protection and management efforts.

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**Image 2.** Red Giant Gliding Squirrel *Petaurista petaurista albiventer* photographed at Sattal, Nainital Uttarakhand.

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