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continued on the back inside cover

Cover: A Warty Hammer Orchid *Drakaea livida* gets pollinated by a male thynnine wasp through 'sexual deception' — a colour pencil reproduction of photos by ron_n_beths (flickr.com) and Rod Peakall; Water colour reproduction of Flame Lily *Gloriosa superba* — photo by Passakoran_14; and a bag worm and its architectural genius (source unknown). Art work by Pannagarsi G.



Water Monitor *Varanus salvator* predation on a Hog Deer *Axis porcinus* fawn at Kaziranga National Park, Assam, India

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The Water Monitor Lizard *Varanus salvator* is a large-growing, carnivorous reptile that is widespread in southern and southeastern Asia (Quah et al. 2021). It is the largest lizard found in India (Ahmed et al. 2009). It is a Schedule I species under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 in India. It is listed in Appendix II of CITES (Chatterjee & Bhattacharyya 2015), and has been categorised as ‘Least Concern’ in the IUCN Red List of threatened species (ver. 3.1). The water monitor is an opportunistic animal and is semi-aquatic in nature, found in a variety of natural, and human-influenced habitats (Pal & Chatterjee 2022). It is both a predator and a scavenger, which feeds on invertebrates, fishes, turtles, snakes, lizards, small mammals, birds, and their eggs (e.g., rats), as well as carrion (e.g., Das 2010; Briggs-Gonzalez et al. 2022).

Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve (26.47–26.79° N; 92.59–93.69° E; 1,055 km²) is located across Golaghat, Nagaon, and Biswanath districts of Assam (NTCA 2025). Famous for the One-horned Rhinoceros, it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a popular tourist destination. With diverse habitats present, Kaziranga National Park serves as an ideal home for reptiles, although it has not been extensively studied due to difficult terrains and the presence of many

large mammalian species (Vignesh et al. 2023). The Water Monitor *V. salvator* and Bengal Monitor *Varanus bengalensis* lizards are among the most visible limbed reptiles of Kaziranga National Park (Pal & Chatterjee 2022).

On the evening of 5 April 2023, during a safari at the central range (Kohora) of Kaziranga National Park, a female Hog Deer *Axis porcinus* was observed exhibiting distress behaviour with continuous distress call under a tree. The deer was seen trying to chase away some other animal by forcefully beating its forelimbs on bushes and ground. Upon closer observation with binoculars and cameras, the team could see a tail. After repositioning the jeep, the team was able to identify the animal as a Water Monitor Lizard *V. salvator*, despite its head being partially obscured by vegetation. After waiting for some time, as the lizard started to move, the team observed a hog deer fawn in its mouth (Image 1). The animal could be identified as a hog deer fawn by looking at the spots on the lateral sides of the body. Kaziranga National Park doesn't fall within the natural distribution range of the superficially similar-looking Spotted Deer *Axis axis*. But the Hog Deer fawns have white spots on the sides of the body, and hence the animal could be identified as a Hog Deer fawn. The monitor lizard was feeding on the

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Image 1. Water Monitor Lizard *Varanus salvator* preying on a Hog Deer fawn *Axis porcinus* in Kaziranga, Assam, India. © Luku Ranjan Nath

fawn. The average Hog Deer *Axis porcinus* fawn weighs approximately 1–1.5 kg and measures 40–50 cm in length at birth (Vignesh et al. 2023). In contrast, adult water monitor lizard like the one observed at Kaziranga, can weigh over 10 kg and exceed 200 cm in total length, making it physically capable of preying upon such a fawn (Ahmed et al. 2009; Pal & Chatterjee 2022).

Water Monitor Lizard *V. salvator* on account of being a large-growing, predator lizard having a reasonably large distribution range, and possible anthropophilic nature, is a rather well-researched species, compared to other lizards, including other monitors in Asia (Briggs-Gonzalez et al. 2022). Closest of such vital feeding events was a report of predation on a kitten by *V. salvator* in Indonesia (Mardiastuti & Kusri 2023). Upon consulting recent literature on the diet of the *V. salvator* complex (Mahaprom & Kulabtong 2018; Yu et al. 2021; Briggs-Gonzalez et al. 2022; Du et al. 2022; Guerrero-Sanchez et al. 2022, 2023; Zdunek & Kolenda 2022; Han 2023; Mardiastuti & Kusri 2023; Trivalairat & Srikosamatara 2023; Zdunek et al. 2024 and references therein), it was found that this is probably the first precise record of a

water monitor preying on a Hog Deer and hence worth placing on record.

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Articles

Fruit bat (Pteropodidae) composition and diversity in the montane forests of Mt. Kampalili, Davao De Oro, Philippines

– Ilamay Joy A. Yangurin, Marion John Michael M. Achondo, Aaron Froilan M. Raganas, Aileen Grace D. Delima, Cyrose Suzie Silvosa-Millado, Dolens James B. Iñigo, Shiela Mae E. Cabrera, Sheryl Moana Marie R. Ollamina, Jayson C. Ibañez & Lief Erikson D. Gamalo, Pp. 27551–27562

The impact of anthropogenic activities on *Manis javanica* Desmarest, 1822 (Mammalia: Pholidota: Manidae) in Sepanggar Hill, Malaysia

– Nurasyiqin Awang Shairi, Julius Kodoh, Normah Binti Awang Besar & Jephthe Sompud, Pp. 27563–27575

Preliminary notes on a coastal population of Striped Hyena *Hyaena hyaena* (Linnaeus, 1758) from Chilika lagoon, India

– Partha Dey, Tiasa Adhya, Gottumukkala Himaja Varma & Supriya Nandy, Pp. 27576–27583

Wildlife management and conservation implications for Blackbuck corresponding with Tal Chhapar Wildlife Sanctuary, Rajasthan, India

– Ulhas Gondhali, Yogendra Singh Rathore, Sandeep Kumar Gupta & Kanti Prakash Sharma, Pp. 27584–27593

Amphibians and reptiles of Chitwan National Park, Nepal: an updated checklist and conservation issues

– Santosh Bhattarai, Bivek Gautam, Chiranjibi Prasad Pokheral & Ram Chandra Kandel, Pp. 27594–27610

Butterfly diversity in Nagarahole (Rajiv Gandhi) National Park of Karnataka, India: an updated checklist

– S. Santhosh, V. Gopi Krishna, G.K. Amulya, S. Sheily, M. Nithesh & S. Basavarajappa, Pp. 27611–27636

Floral traits, pollination syndromes, and nectar resources in tropical plants of Western Ghats

– Ankur Patwardhan, Medhavi Tadwalkar, Amruta Joglekar, Mrunalini Sonne, Vivek Pawar, Pratiksha Mestry, Shivani Kulkarni, Akanksha Kashikar & Tejaswini Pachpor, Pp. 27637–27650

Ecological status, distribution, and conservation strategies of *Terminalia coronata* in the community forests of southern Haryana, India

– K.C. Meena, Neetu Singh, M.S. Bhandoria, Pradeep Bansal & S.S. Yadav, Pp. 27651–27660

Pterocarpus santalinus L.f. (Magnoliopsida: Fabales: Fabaceae) associated arboreal diversity in Seshachalam Biosphere Reserve, Eastern Ghats of Andhra Pradesh, India

– Buchanapalli Sunil Kumar, Araveeti Madhusudhana Reddy, Chennuru Nagendra, Madha Venkata Suresh Babu, Nandimanadalam Rajasekhar Reddy, Veeramasu Jyosthna Sailaja Rani & Salkapuram Sunitha, Pp. 27661–27674

Potential distribution, habitat composition, preference and threats to Spikenard *Nardostachys jatamansi* (D.Don) DC. in Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary, Trashigang, Bhutan

– Dorji Phuntsho, Namgay Shacha, Pema Rinzin & Tshewang Tenzin, Pp. 27675–27687

Checklist of floristic diversity of Mahadare Conservation Reserve, Satara, Maharashtra, India

– Sunil H. Bhoite, Shweta R. Sutar, Jaykumar J. Chavan & Swapnaja M. Deshpande, Pp. 27688–27704

Communication

Assessing fish diversity in the Ujani reservoir: an updated overview after one decade

– Ganesh Markad, Ranjit More, Vinod Kakade & Jiwan Sarwade, Pp. 27705–27719

Reviews

A review of 21st century studies on lizards (Reptilia: Squamata: Sauria) in northeastern India with an updated regional checklist

– Manmath Bharali, Manab Jyoti Kalita, Narayan Sharma & Ananda Ram Boro, Pp. 27720–27733

Understanding the ethnozoological drivers and socioeconomic patterns of bird hunting in the Indian subcontinent

– Anish Banerjee, Pp. 27734–27747

Short Communications

Recent records of endemic bird White-faced Partridge *Arborophila orientalis* (Horsfield, 1821) in Meru Betiri National Park, Indonesia

– Arif Mohammad Siddiq & Nur Kholiq, Pp. 27748–27753

Exploring carapace phenotypic variation in female Fiddler Crab *Austruca annulipes* (H. Milne Edwards, 1837): insights into adaptive strategies and ecological significance

– Vaishnavi Bharti, Sagar Naik & Nitin Sawant, Pp. 27754–27760

Habitat-specific distribution and density of fireflies (Coleoptera: Lampyridae): a comparative study between grassland and woodland habitats

– Kushal Choudhury, Firdus Ali, Bishal Basumatary, Meghraj Barman, Papiya Das & Hilloljyoti Singha, Pp. 27761–27765

Hygrophila phlomoides Nees (Acanthaceae), a new record to the flora of northern India from Suhelwa Wildlife Sanctuary, Uttar Pradesh

– Pankaj Bharti, Baleshwar Meena, T.S. Rana & K.M. Prabhukumar, Pp. 27766–27770

The rediscovery of *Strobilanthes parryorum* C.E.C.Fisch., 1928 (Asterids: Lamiales: Acanthaceae) in Mizoram, India

– Lucy Lalawmpuii, Renthlei Lalnunfeli, Paulraj Selva Singh Richard, Pochamoni Bharath Simha Yadav, Subbiah Karuppusamy & Kholhring Lalchandama, Pp. 27771–27776

New report of *Biophytum nervifolium* Thwaites (Oxalidaceae) from Gujarat, India

– Kishan Ishwarlal Prajapati, Siddharth Dangar, Santhosh Kumar Ettickal Sukumar, Vivek Chauhan & Ekta Joshi, Pp. 27777–27781

Note

Water Monitor *Varanus salvator* predation on a Hog Deer *Axis porcinus* fawn at Kaziranga National Park, Assam, India

– Saurav Kumar Boruah, Luku Ranjan Nath, Shisukanta Nath & Nilutpal Mahanta, Pp. 27782–27784

Book Review

A book review of moths from the Eastern Ghats: Moths of Agastya

– Sanjay Sondhi, Pp. 27785–27786

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