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CURRENT STATUS OF THE CHINESE PANGOLIN IN SOME COMMUNITY FORESTS OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH, INDIA

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Introduction

North-eastern India is one of the 25 megabiodiversity hotspot regions of the world (Myers *et al.*, 2000). Arunachal Pradesh lies in the north-easternmost part of India and comprises a major portion of the biological hotspot region of the Eastern Himalaya, with vegetation ranging from tropical to alpine. Generally, pangolins are nocturnal, elusive, non-aggressive, solitary, insectivorous, and burrowing animals (Gaubert, 2011). They play a role in maintaining ant and termite populations in various ecosystems (Roberts, 1997). In India, two species of pangolins are found, Indian pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*) and Chinese pangolin (*Manis pentadactyla*). So far, only the Chinese pangolin has been reported from the state. The Chinese pangolin represents the intermediate form between Malayan and Indian pangolins (Pocock, 1924). They occur in the Himalayan foothills in eastern Nepal, Bhutan, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Vietnam, Thailand, China and Taiwan (Shrestha, 2003; Duckworth *et al.*, 2008). The pangolins are also hunted for medicinal purpose by the Nishi and Galo tribes of Arunachal Pradesh (Chakravorty *et al.*, 2011). Indigenous communities as well as poachers in the region continue to hunt it due to a high demand on the international market as well as for local consumption. The lack of

information and awareness regarding this species among local residents has resulted in an increase in hunting and poaching as well as extensive habitat degradation in areas where they were previously common. To better understand the present situation, a survey was undertaken in villages where pangolins are known to occur. Direct and indirect evidence of pangolins were recorded with the help of local people to determine the presence or absence of the species.

Result and Discussion

An extensive survey for signs of pangolin presence like burrows, fecal matter, claw marks, etc. was undertaken in three community forests, namely the Renuk community forest of Changlang district; the Mebo and Mariyang community forest of East Siang district and the Parsi-Parlo circle of Kurung Kumey district. Indirect evidence like occupied burrows and fecal matter was found in the Renuk community forest. High counts of burrows were also recorded from Mebo and Mariyang community forest and Parsi-Parlo circle. A total of 63 burrows were located. There were 28 burrows in the Renuk community forest; 17 burrows in the Parsi-Parlo circle; 10 burrows in Mebo and 8 burrows in the Mariyang community forest. These burrows were within 1 km radius of the village in Renuk; 2 km radius in the Parsi-

Parlo circle, 2 km radius in the Mebo and 7 km radius in the Mariyang community forest. Most of the burrows were in vicinity of bamboo groves. A relatively higher number of burrows were recorded in bamboo groves with more than 50% canopy cover.

In Arunachal Pradesh current market demands are rapidly increasing local pressure on hunting of rare and endangered animals in some regions, which include pangolins. It is essential to protect the remaining population of the species through *in-situ* conservation in the wild with community participation in the region. The lack of information, awareness and unchecked hunting among the local residents with reference to this species and increased habitat degradation in the area has increased threats to pangolins. Data on human perspective, traditional knowledge and social belief in relation to pangolin should be documented which will help to streamline future conservation strategy.

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Fig. 1: Claw mark of pangolin at the mouth of an occupied burrow



Fig 2. Fecal matter of Pangolin with undigested termites



Fig 3. Burrow of pangolin from East Siang



Fig 4. Burrow of pangolin from Changlang