

87/19001

# Forestry Development in North-East India

Foreword  
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GUWAHATI

NEW DELHI

# Wild Mammalian Resources of Tripura

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With the growing pressure on natural resources various forms of environmental degradation are evident in different parts of the country especially in the north eastern states. Wild life resources are highly sensitive to such degradations as habitat destruction which lead to extinction of species in the majority of cases. The status of wild life in any area, therefore, may act as a good bioindicator to measure environmental quality in the natural ecosystem.

Informations regarding wild life resources of Tripura are scanty. Earliest scientific report is by Sterndale<sup>1</sup> who has categorically mentioned about the existence of Capped langur, Tipperah langur, Brush tailed porcupine, Javan rhinoceros, Gayal and Javan anteater in Tipperah. Among recent books on wild life of India only those by Stracey<sup>2</sup> and Prater<sup>3</sup> men-

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tioned about presence of slow loris in Tipperah. Such want of information on the wild mammalian fauna of Tripura suggests that either the area is very poorly inhabited by these animals or there was no serious effort in past to carry out systematic survey work to explore the real status of the wild animals in this State.

Notwithstanding the lack of scientific information, the need for the protection of wild life was realised during the early fifties and State Wild Life Board was constituted in February 1954.<sup>4</sup> An appeal by Sri S.L.Singh, Chairman, Wild Life Advisory Board, Tripura was broadcast in the Tripuri Language from Gauhati Radio Station 8th October, 1957, for the preservation of wild life. However, the '3rd Session of the Indian Board of wild life' held in February 1958 records that no reply was received from the State as far as the question of affording effective protection of wild life from concerted attack by the tribal people was concerned. Perhaps the dilemma was what is more important, Man or Animal, ignoring the fundamental principle of wild life conservation that the concern for wild life is the concern for man himself; since all forms of life including man are so closely interlinked that disturbance in one results in the imbalance in the entire system.

Of late some measures had been taken by the State Government to protect wild life and Tripura proposed to create a game sanctuary during the third plan.<sup>5</sup> Although this could not be ultimately translated into action, the Wild Life (Protection) Act 1972 was enforced in Tripura with effect from 2nd October, 1973. In 1976 Sri R.N.Chakraborty prepared 'First working plan for southern soil conservation division Tripura' for sixth plan. While discussing the status of wild life of this division he emphasised: "In view of the scanty wild life population it is considered essential to completely protect whatever wild life are now still left with and to improve the stock. It is however, prescribed that no shooting will be permissible in this division except the rogue elephant, monkey and wild boar which will be permitted by the Chief

Wild Life Warden under the provisions of the Wild Life (Protection) Act during the currency of this plan."<sup>6</sup>

### Present Distribution and Status of Wild Mammalian Fauna of Tripura

The 1970 Tiger census recorded 6 tigers from Tripura. Agrawal<sup>7</sup> reported Phayre's leaf monkey for the first time from India and Agrawal and Bhattacharya<sup>8</sup> reported 7 species of primates in Tripura. Mukherjee started a survey of the non human primates of Tripura in 1976 and published 3 papers dealing with the ecology and distribution of these animals.<sup>9,10,11</sup> He reported 8 species from the State and opined that Rhesus is the most common monkey in Tripura and it is the only monkey to invade cultivated fields. Next in abundance to this monkey in Tripura is Phayre's leaf monkey, which is reported only from Tripura and nowhere else in India. This monkey is also known from Bangladesh adjacent to Tripura.<sup>12</sup> Previously the species was thought to be distributed only in Burma and Thailand.<sup>13</sup> It is probable that this species may also be discovered from Mizoram in future. *Hylobates hoolock* is the only ape found in Tripura and its estimated population in Tripura is about 1000 to 1400.<sup>11</sup>

34 species of mammals have been listed in the faunal section of the Tripura District Gazetteers.<sup>14</sup> Chakraborty enlisted 36 species of mammals which are likely to be found in Tripura but according to R.P. Mukherjee of the Zoological Survey of India (Personal Communication) only 32 species have so far been recorded from this State. A preliminary survey by the present authors reveals that there are 56 species of wild mammals which are now found in Tripura. The mammalian fauna belongs to 9 orders and 20 families. Existence of a few more species is also apprehended. The exact status of such species can only be ascertained with certainty after undertaking extensive systematic surveys. A systematic list of the wild mammalian fauna along with notes on their distribution within Tripura is included in Appendix-I.

Some species found in Tripura are listed in Schedule I of the Indian Wild Life (Protection) Act as rare and endangered

and need protection from becoming extinct. Some species are rapidly dwindling as for example the elephant. It was very common in Tripura during last century. A detailed description of 'Elephant Kheda' has been included in the *Rajmala*.<sup>15</sup> From elephant trade alone Maharaja used to get up to 23-24 thousand rupees annually as tax from traders. Even in the early fifties elephants used to invade college tillas at Agartala. But now wild elephant population has declined considerably in the forest of Tripura. Habitat destruction is a major cause of their depletion. It is believed that a large population has migrated to Bangladesh after the construction of Gomti reservoir. Although definite proof to this effect is lacking elephants have been noticed to migrate from Chittagong hills to Jatanbari area during June-July every year to invade jhum fields.

Some forms like rhinoceros, wild buffalo etc. have become extinct in this State during recent past. Now it is our duty to afford protection to the remaining mammalian fauna of this State to prevent further extinction and to conserve such renewable resources for future use. The majority of recent extinctions may be attributed to environmental changes arising from alteration or destruction of natural habitats, deforestation, extension of agriculture and spreading urbanisation. Unrestricted hunting might have added a further dimension to the growing problem. The need for wild life preservation studies in wild life sanctuaries, wild life problems and management have been included in the priorities for research studies in the 'Report of the task force for the study of eco-development in the Himalayan region' set by the Planning Commission, Government of India.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, it is suggested that a wild life sanctuary may be set up in Tripura which is the only State in India not having any Sanctuary or National Park and a detailed systematic survey be undertaken to investigate the present population status and distribution of the wild animals of Tripura.

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## APPENDIX—I

An annotated list of the wild mammals of Tripura. Species belonging to Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act are marked by asterisk (\*).

## 1. Order—Primata.

Family—Tupauidae.

1. Common tree shrew, *Tupaia glis assamensis* Wroughton  
Distribution—Ambassa and Ganganagar.

Family—Lorisidae.

- \*2. Slow loris, *Nycticebus coucang bengalensis* (Fischer).  
Distribution—Bishalgarh, Udaipur, South Tripura.

Family—Cercopithecidae.

3. Rhesus macaque, *Macaca mulatta mulatta* (Zimmerman).

Distribution—Widely in whole Tripura.

4. Phayres leaf monkey, *Presbytis phayrei phayrei* Blyth.  
Distribution—Widely in whole Tripura.

5. Pigtail macaque, *Macaca nemestrina* Pocock.

Distribution—South Tripura.

6. Capped Langur, *Presbytis pileatus durga*,  
Wroughton.

Distribution—South Tripura and Central Tripura.

7. Stump tailed macaque, *Macaca arctoides speciosa* F.  
Cuvier.

Distribution—South Tripura.

8. Hanuman langur, *Presbytis entellus* Dufresne.

Distribution—Atharamora Hill ranges, North Tripura.

Family—Hylobatidae.

- \*9. Hoolock gibbon, *Hylobates hoolock* (Harlan).

Distribution—Once widely distributed, now confined to the hills of North and South Tripura.

### VIII. Order—Artiodactyla.

Family—Bovidae.

- \*1. Indian bison, *Bos gaurus* H. Smith.  
Distribution—Hilly area of South Tripura.

Family—Rupicaprinae.

1. The goral, *Nemorhaedus goral* (Hardwicke).  
Distribution—Higher elevations of Atharamora hill ranges.

- \*2. The serow, *Capricornis sumatraensis* (Dechstein).  
Distribution—Bishalgarh, Central Tripura.

Family—Cervidae.

1. Barking deer, *Muntiacus muntjak vaginalis* (Boddaert).

2. Chital or spotted deer, *Axis axis axis* (Erxleben).

3. Sambar, *Cervus unicolor*. Kerr.

Distribution—All deer are widely distributed. Barking deer is the most abundant.

Family—Suidae.

1. Wild boar, *Sus scrofa cristatus* Wagner.

Distribution—Kalajhari and South Tripura Hills.

### IX. Order—Pholidota.

Family—Manidae.

- \*1. The pangolin, *Manis pentadactyla* Linn.

Distribution—Central Tripura.