

Distribution Update

New distribution record of the Critically Endangered Chinese pangolin *Manis pentadactyla* in Bhutan

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The Chinese pangolin *Manis pentadactyla* is one of the eight species of pangolins and is classified as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Its population is rapidly declining due to high levels of poaching for meat and scales across its range (Challender et al. 2014). It is highly susceptible due to its low reproductive rate (usually one litter per year, one cub per litter), food specialization, very poor defense mechanism and strict requirement for habitat (Wu et al. 2004a)

This species is distributed in the southern foothills of Bhutan, China, Hong Kong, India, Laos, Myanmar, Nepal, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam (IUCN SSC Pangolin Specialist Group, 2018). In Bhutan, it is mostly found in Samtse, Sarpang and Samdrup Jongkhar districts (Dorji 2017).

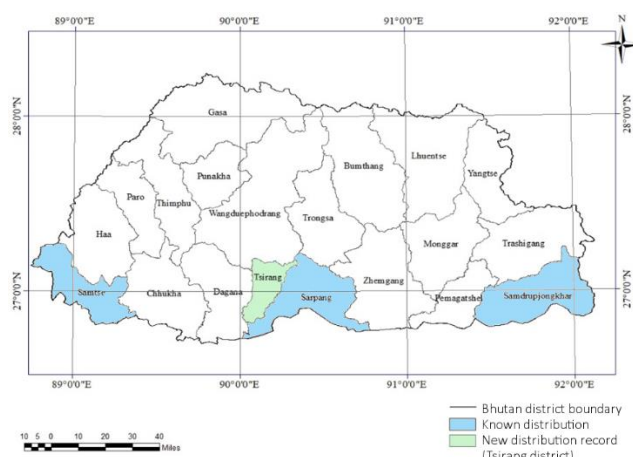


FIG. 1: Map showing districts with new and known distribution areas of Chinese pangolin in Bhutan.

Chinese pangolin mostly prefers broad-leaved forest due to higher presence of termites, its principle diet (Wu et al. 2004b). Primary forest was found to support more pangolins probably due to the availability of large numbers of old hollow trees fit for sleeping and as den (Newton et al. 2008). Besides primary and secondary forest, pangolins have been recorded to occur in oil palm and rubber plantation and near human settlement (Gurung and Singh 1996, Azhar et al. 2013, Katuwal et al. 2015). In Nepal, forest patches and agriculture land in close proximity to human dominated landscape were found to be preferred habitat (Katuwal et al. 2015, Thapa et al. 2014). In Bhutan, pangolins are mostly found in cardamom cultivation area in winter for feeding (Wangchuk 2010) and the maximum numbers of burrows

were observed in such cultivation areas in Samtse district (Dorji 2017).

On 4 April 2018, a local resident of Tsirang reported a sighting of a strange injured animal. Upon receiving the information, a team of forestry staff from Tsirang Forest Division rushed to the site where they found a female Chinese pangolin (PHOTO 1) in a defensive rolled position.



PHOTO 1: Chinese pangolin after its release in Tsirang district.

The pangolin was brought to the Interim Wildlife Rescue Centre of Tsirang Forest Division for treatment and rehabilitation. Weighing 6.1 kg, the female Chinese Pangolin was kept in the wildlife center for 73 hours for treatment and then released back to a safe natural habitat. This is the first report of Chinese Pangolin in Tsirang District, Bhutan. This sighting confirms the distribution of the Chinese pangolin in Southern Central Bhutan (FIG. 1).

Further detailed studies are highly recommended to understand the extent of its distribution, threats and mitigation measures to prevent a further decline in its population.

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Biosketch

KINLEY is currently working as head of Wildlife and Nature Conservation Section in Tsirang Forest Division. He studies ecology of threatened species, human wildlife conflict and the impact of climate change on wildlife and its habitat.

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