

Distribution, Habitats and Conservation Status of the Indian Pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*) in Sri Lanka

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M. crassicaudata is the only pangolin species occurring in Sri Lanka and it is known to occur throughout the lowlands. The population size of *M. crassicaudata* in Sri Lanka is largely unknown, and their abundance varies with only a few known locations in the country where the pangolins are rather frequently recorded. The growing information on the international trading and trafficking of pangolins, and the recent listing of Indian pangolin in the Appendix I of the CITES has generated a considerable interest on Indian pangolin among researchers and conservationists in Sri Lanka. However, the absence of long-term data is a major impediment in determining the precise distribution of the Indian pangolins in the country and assessing the conservation status. Hence this study was aimed at bridging this important literature gap by updating the distribution, habitats and conservation status of the Indian pangolin occurring in Sri Lanka using an extensive set of primary and secondary data collected from multiple sources. Results confirmed the occurrence of Indian pangolin in habitats up to 1850m ASL. Based on a total of 281 confirmed pangolin sightings/records, it was found that a higher concentration of Indian pangolin populations occur in the North-west, North-central, Southwest lowlands and South-eastern parts of the island. As per the IUCN (2018) habitat classification, the species was mostly recorded from tropical shrubland (26.33%), tropical dry forest (19.22%), tropical moist lowland forest (15.30%), tropical dry grassland (11.74%) and tropical heavily degraded former forest habitats (8.90%). Results revealed that wildlife crimes related to the Indian pangolins are rising. Hunting for subsistence, hunting/live capture to sell as meat, hunting for scales, and traps intended for other agricultural pests are the main threats to *M. crassicaudata* in Sri Lanka. Recent confiscations of pangolin scales by law enforcement authorities and growing incidents of poaching pangolins for illegal trade hint the existence of local niche markets for pangolin meat and scales with a possible international trading pathway of *M. crassicaudata* scales from Sri Lanka to South India. The data presented here provide important information for global and national conservation status assessment of *M. crassicaudata*, and impetus for conservation planning of the species in Sri Lanka.

Key words: Pangolin, Distribution, Habitats, Conservation, Crime, wildlife trade