

RECENT OCCURRENCE OF THE HISPID HARE, *CAPROLAGUS HISPIDUS*  
(PEARSON), IN THE DUARS OF WEST BENGAL

The Hispid Hare, *Caprolagus hispidus* (Pearson), originally described from northern Assam, had been known to occur in the Duars area of northern West Bengal in the earlier part of the present century (Gee 1964). Since then there has been no report of this animal from that area. During a field investigation on the status of some lesser cats in Chilapata forest area in the Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal, we were informed about the occurrence of a dark brown, small-eared hare befitting the description of the Hispid Hare. We, therefore, looked for it, and sighted in four times in Jaldapara-Chilapata area (alt. c 62-92 m) during our field work, which prove its existence there still.

In one instance, in the evening on 3 April 1982, we had two fleeting glimpses of the Hispid in the forest on the north of Chilapata Forest Log Depot, not far from a thatchland. The second observation of this animal was made on 7 April 1982 while we were making field observation on elephant back in the morning hours (c 8.30 or so) on the western bank of the Sil Torsa River along an area with patches of tall grass. The same night while scanning the forest with spot light from the jeep at about 0.30 hrs (8 April 1982) another Hispid was seen in a patchy thatchland in Sissamara area. A Rufous-tailed Hare (*Lepus nigricollis ruficaudatus* Geoffroy) was also noticed following this sighting in an open scrubby area near Sissamara Beat Office.

The last sighting of the Hispid was made on 12 September 1983 at about 22.30 hrs, in the proximity of C. C. Line Camp on the eastern bank of Sil Torsa River, thatchland area.

The sighting areas of the Hispid at Chilapata and the western bank of Sil Torsa River were strewn with the characteristic pellets of the Hispid Hare. The pellets collected from these areas are of two distinct sizes, i. e., 12.5-13.1 mm and 16.1-16.3 mm (*vs* about 10 mm or so in *Lepus nigricollis*) in diameter, as has been recorded in the Rajgarh Forest of Assam (Oliver 1980, Ghose 1981).

The Hispids are primarily dendizens of the grasslands, though at times may also visit open areas for feeding during the night. On the contrary, the sympatric Rufous-tailed Hare (*L. n. ruficaudatus*) which has also been observed by us on several occasions near human habitations around Jaldapara-Chilapata areas during the night prefers comparatively open scrub forests instead of primary thatchlands, as in Assam.

The main components of the thatches or the grasslands in Jaldapara-Chilapata area are Khagra (*Phragmites karaka*) and tall *kasila* grasses (*Saccharum spontaneum*), also *Saccharum procerum*, *Erianthus elephantus*, *Anthistria brasiliensis* etc, and are commonly found on sandy soils, but may also be encountered in clay pockets, which are often silted-up on old stream beds (Spillett 1966).

## REFERENCES

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