

**ON THE WESTERN LIMIT OF PIGTAILED MACAQUE
DISTRIBUTION IN N.E. INDIA**

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INTRODUCTION

The Pigtailed Macaque, *Macaca nemestrina* Linn. is one of the 11 species of non-human primates found in the North-Eastern Regions of India. This species is found in the Asian continent from Assam in the North through South Burma and Western Thailand to Malaya Peninsula, extending to Sumatra, Borneo and Mentawai Islands in the South (Medway 1970 & Caldecott 1986). In North-Eastern India their occurrence from Naga Hills was reported by McCann (1933) and from Hollongapar (Assam) by Tilson (1982). In the detailed work on Pigtailed macaque, Bernstein (1967) reported that these animals were hunted for food throughout most of their distributional range, which is true also for the North-Eastern Region of India (the authors personally have witnessed the hunting of Pigtailed Macaque by the local tribals and relishing its meat in West Garo Hills, Meghalaya). The present report records for the first time their occurrence in Garo & Khasi Hills of Meghalaya State, which has not yet been reported (Tilson, 1982).

While working on the hoolock gibbon project in the State of Meghalaya, North-Eastern India, the complete area was surveyed extensively to locate/sight groups of gibbons for long term investigations on their ecology and behaviour. In October 1984, the project came into operation and till March 1989 almost all the tropical evergreen and mixed deciduous forests of Garo & Khasi Hills were surveyed thoroughly.

During these four and a half years duration the number of occasions these macaques encountered and field notes were made on their group size and composition, home range and food & feeding. Tilson (1982) while censusing the hill forests bordering the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam, hill tracts of the Garo United Khasi-Jaintia, Mikir & North Cachar Hills lying South of Brahmaputra river and Dafla Hills North of the river during his 62 days duration in July-August 1971 & December-February 1972-73, reported that the pigtailed macaques were not found in the Garo and United Khasi-Jaintia Hills. However, Biswas & Diengdoh (1977) had reported their occurrence in Meghalaya from Khasi Hills. In fact they also reported that a pigtailed macaque was captured and put into the State Zoo at Shillong.

From our extensive survey, we observed 4 groups of these macaques in West Garo

Hills near the village sacred forests and 2 groups in West Khasi Hills bordering East & West Garo Hills. No solitary individuals were encountered. However, the groups sighted were small in size (Fooden 1975). The groups size varied from 4-12 individuals with an average group size of 7.2 individuals. All groups encountered were bisexual, and none of them were either all male or all female. Adult females (mothers) were observed carrying new infants in their ventrum during both winter and summer months.

Invariably these macaques were observed occupying the middle canopy of their habitat and frequently they were seen coming down to lower canopy, and even occasionally on the forest floor too. They maintained apparently an extensive home range, and certainly much more than the territory of the hoolock gibbons. The pigtailed macaques were observed feeding on the fruits of wild *Ficus*, *Grewia*, *Dalbergia*, *Prunus*, *Vanguria*, *Vitex*, *Calamus* and sometimes on fruits of *Artocarpus*, *Mangifera*, *Tamarindus* and *Citrus* near the villages. Feeding on Leaves and flowers of *Bauhinia*, *Mucuna* *Stereospermum*, *Parkia* and number of bamboo species, during different season of the year were also observed, and quite a good time of their total feeding time was spent here.

Hence, West Garo Hills, of the State of Meghalaya probably is the Western most limit of the distribution of pigtailed macaque, in North-Eastern India. Extensive and intensive surveys are required in these regions with particular reference to this species to enable to identify the status of these animals.

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