



First Record of the Critically Endangered Three-striped Roofed Turtle, *Batagur dhongoka* (Gray 1834), from the Yamuna River, Delhi, India

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India is home to 29 species of freshwater turtles and tortoises belonging to four different families (Ahmed et al. 2009). Of the three species in the genus *Batagur* (Bataguridae), *Batagur dhongoka* (formerly *Kachuga dhongoka*) is endemic to India, Nepal, and Bangladesh (Iverson 1992). In India, the species is restricted to the north (Smith 1931), where it occurs in the Ganga and Chambal Rivers and their floodplains (Moll and Moll 2004; Sirsi et al. 2017). These turtles have been recorded from the states of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, and Assam (Das et al. 2019; Bhupathy and Mathur 2013) but not from Delhi (Husain 1997).

Delhi once supported robust populations of several aquatic reptiles, including the Mugger Crocodile (*Crocodylus palustris*), the Gharial (*Gavialis gangeticus*), and two species of soft-shelled turtles (Husain 1997). However, due to rapid urbanization and habitat fragmentation, riverine biodiversity has declined considerably.

At 1737 h on 1 February 2019, in the course of a biodiversity assessment in Delhi, we encountered a live Three-

striped Roofed Turtle (*Batagur dhongoka*) (carapace length of 38 cm; Fig. 1) on the bank of the Yamuna River in the Alipur Region of northwestern Delhi (28°47'58.1"N, 77°12'10.2"E) (Fig. 2). The area was sandy with scattered grasses and shrubs. We identified the turtle based on a description in Smith (1931), which was later confirmed by Dr. Shailendra Singh.

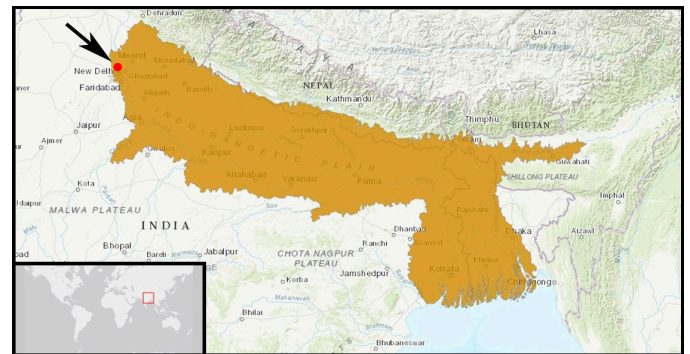


Fig. 2. Distribution of the Three-striped Roofed Turtle (*Batagur dhongoka*). The red dot indicated by an arrow marks the locality in the Yamuna River, Delhi, India. Modified from Das et al. (2019).



Fig. 1. A Three-striped Roofed Turtle (*Batagur dhongoka*) on the bank of the Yamuna River, Delhi, India. Photographs by Gaurav Barhadiya.

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first record of a Three-striped Roofed Turtle from the Yamuna River and the state of Delhi.

The closest historical record of *Batagur dhongoka* is in the Hindon River at Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh (Moll 1986, 1987). Subsequently, few turtle surveys have been conducted in the Delhi National Capital Region (Husain 1997). Das (1991) stated that *Batagur dhongoka* was once fairly common in the Ganga River and its floodplain. However, the population declined rapidly due to various threats that include overharvesting, sand mining, and pollution from urban, industrial, and agricultural sources (Chaudhury et al. 2000; Sirsi et al. 2017; Das et al. 2019). Although this species is listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List (Das et al. 2019), it lacks any legal protection in India, where it is still not listed under the Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

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