



Occurrence of Indian Eyed Turtle, *Morenia petersi* Anderson 1879 (Geoemydidae), in State of Odisha, India: A New Record for the State

Satyanarjan Behera¹, Pratyush P. Mohapatra² and Prakash Chandra Mardaraj³

¹Odisha Biodiversity Board, Bhubaneswar, Odisha 751015, India (behera.satyanarjan@gmail.com)

²Zoological Survey of India, New Alipore, Kolkata 700053, India

³Forest, Environment and Climate Change Department, Government of Odisha, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India

The Indian Eyed Turtle (*Morenia petersi*) is a small, freshwater turtle species categorized as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List and in Appendix II of CITES. The species is not listed in the Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. It is distributed across northern and northeast India, southern Nepal, and Bangladesh (Das and Sengupta 2010). In India, the species is restricted to the drainage system of the Ganga River extending from Uttarakhand through Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and the western part of the Brahmaputra River, and Assam (Ahmed and Das 2009; Bahuguna 2010; Mahapatra et al. 2020). The distribution patterns and ecology of this rarely encountered species are poorly known, but they have been observed in lentic habitats, such as oxbow lakes, ponds, and rivers. They are also reported from the Terai landscape (marshy jungles and floodplains at the lower foothills of the Himalayas) in India (Mital et al. 2019). The major threats to the species are habitat loss, pollution, and hunting for food and trade (Mital et al. 2019). Here we present a new distribution record of *Morenia petersi* from the state of Odisha.

At 1335 h on 9 September 2019, during a biodiversity inventory in northern Balasore District of Odisha on India's east coast (21.9322°N, 87.2415°E; elev. 14 m asl), we rescued a freshwater turtle from fishermen near Olamara under the jurisdiction of Jaleswar Wildlife Range (Fig. 1). The carapace was somewhat domed, with a low or absent vertebral keel in adults and unserrated marginals. The carapace was deep green, with olive-black and the plastron was yellow. It had the characteristic three yellow streaks on each side of the head, the lower one extending from below the nostril to the angle of the mouth. The species was identified following Das and Sengupta (2010) and confirmed as an Indian Eyed Turtle. While talking with fishermen, they clarified that the species was caught from a sandbar near River Subarnarekha.

The locality record is close to West Bengal, lying on the left bank of River Subarnarekha (Fig. 2). The nearest locality record of this species is from Medinipur District, West Bengal (Mahapatra et al. 2020). A photo of an Indian Eyed Turtle was also obtained via the WhatsApp messenger platform from an anonymous source claiming to be from Olamara, Odisha, on 27 August 2020, however the exact locality of the photo



Fig. 1. The rescued Indian Eyed Turtle (*Morenia petersi*) from near Olamara GP, Balasore (KUDA 13795). Photo credits: Prakash Chandra Mardaraj.

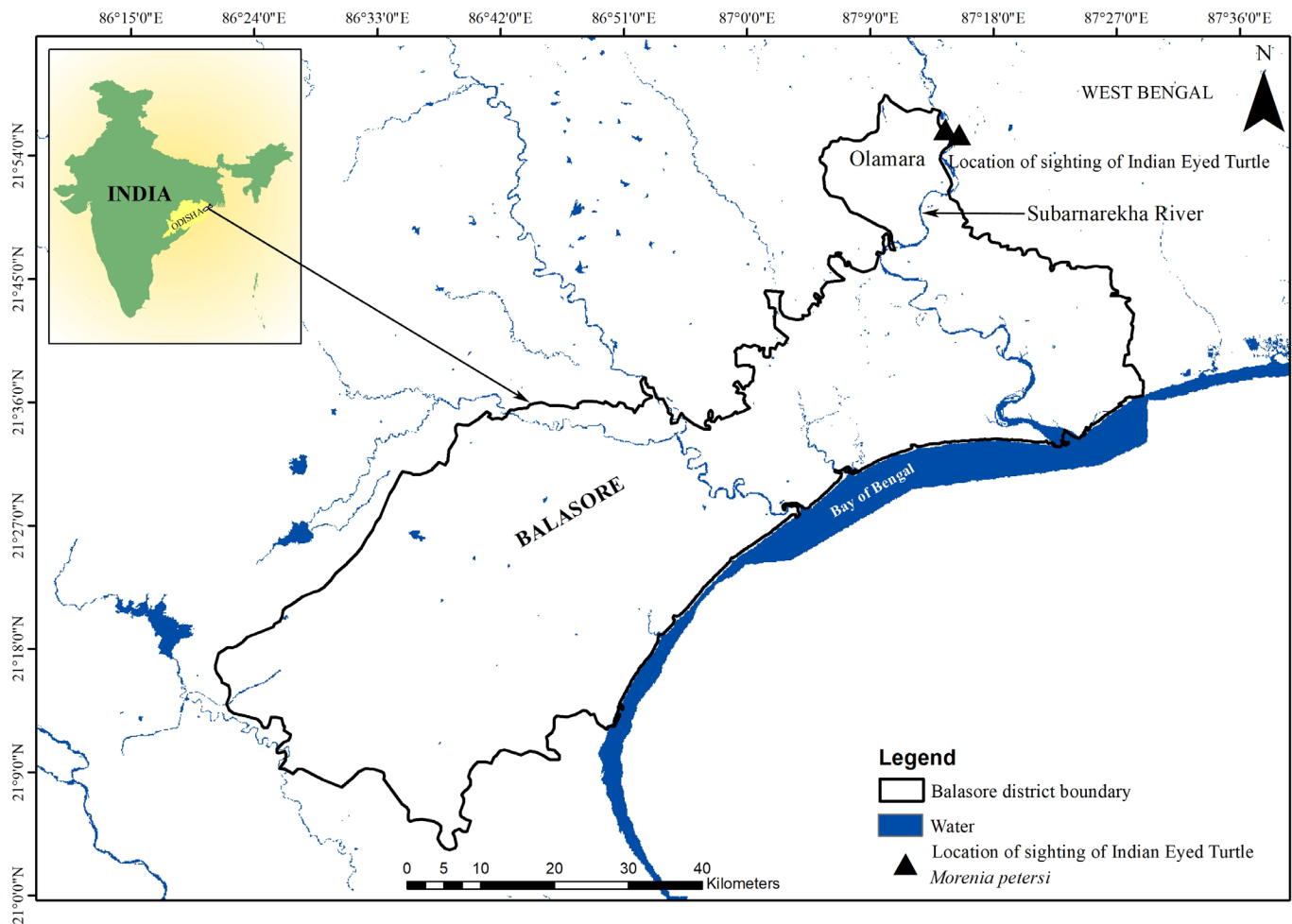


Fig. 2. A map showing the location of the new state record for *Morenia petersi* in Odisha, India.

was not established. The photograph was deposited in the University of Kansas Biodiversity Herpetology Collection (KUDA 13795).

The chelonian fauna of Odisha comprises 17 species; four marine, eleven freshwater turtles and two land tortoises (Behera et al. 2019). This new record of *M. petersi* from Odisha demonstrates that the distribution and ranging patterns of such rare species is still unknown in India. The species is vulnerable due to habitat loss, pollution, pesticide runoff, and exploitation for meat (Mital et al. 2019). Further research is required to study the possible occurrence of the species in more parts of northern Odisha to assess its conservation needs.

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