REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

Herpetofaunal Inventory of the Ranga Reserve Forest, Lakhimpur, Assam, India

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Abstract.—The Ranga Reserve Forest in Assam, India, is a crucial ecological enclave in the biodiverse northeastern region. The forest's diverse landscape, characterized by riverine and hilly terrain, offers a habitat mosaic conducive to a rich array of amphibians and reptiles. We herein present a comprehensive inventory of the herpetofauna conducted from March 2021 to June 2022. We encountered a total of 60 herpetofaunal species (13 amphibians and 47 reptiles: 11 lizards, 34 snakes, and two turtles), including critically endangered, endangered, vulnerable, and near-threatened species. Our findings highlight the Ranga Reserve Forest as a hotspot of herpetofaunal diversity, emphasizing the importance of continued research and conservation efforts to safeguard this invaluable ecosystem.

Northeastern India is a major biological diversity hotspot with elements of both the Himalayan and Indo-Burmese hotspots (Mittermeier et al. 2004). In Assam, 59.4% of the total forest area of the state is designated as reserved forest, which serves as an important habitat for diverse flora and fauna. The Ranga Reserve Forest lies between the Dikrong and Ranganadi Rivers in Lakhimpur District of Assam. Its northern boundary aligns with Papum Pare District in Arunachal Pradesh, and it shares boundaries with the adjacent Kakoi Reserve Forest. This reserved forest complex serves as the southwestern extension of that in Arunachal Pradesh. The herpetofaunal diversity in Ranga Reserve Forest has not been previously studied and the absence of scientific data regarding the fauna in this sanctuary has hindered assessment of its conservation status and importance (Thapa et al. 2024).

Herpetofauna link terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems and, as ectotherms, are affected by seasonal variations more than other vertebrates (Pradhan et al. 2014). Amphibians and reptiles are fundamental components of food chains and also act as biocontrol agents in agroecosystems (Channing and Howell 2006). Of the 454 species of amphibians recorded in India, 411 are anurans, 41 are gymnophionans, and two are salamanders (Dinesh et al. 2023). Of the 778 species and subspecies of reptiles in India, three are crocodiles, 377 are lizards, 354 are snakes, and 44 are turtles and tortoises (Mohapatra et al. 2024). Protecting herpetofaunal diversity in various habitats can contribute to the sustainable stability, resilience, and resistance of ecosystems (Gibbons et al. 2000).

The objective of this study was to conduct an inventory of herpetofauna in the reserve forest. Such records will contribute to a better understanding of the importance of the reserve forest and assist in the assessment and implementation of its conservation needs.

Methods

Study Area.—The Ranga Reserve Forests in Lakhimpur District of Assam, India, spans an area of 85.29 km^2 (93.7937–94.0202, 27.1179–27.3225) (Fig. 1), with 88.14% of the are covered by dense or open forests (Saikia and Saikia 2020). Sampling sites within the forest included Gulajuli, Bogoli, Kachajuli, Dhekiajuli, Rampur, and Kimin.

The Ranga Reserve Forest features a diverse landscape characterized by riverine and hilly terrain, showcasing a variety of vegetation types ranging from riverine grasslands to lowland tropical rainforests (Borah and Bhuyan 2016). The lowland expanses extend across the entire Ranga Reserve, which is situated north of the Brahmaputra River, and merge northward with low hill ranges that extend into Arunachal Pradesh. Forests in these areas are primarily semi-deciduous (Nath and Pradhan 2012).

Survey Methods.—We employed visual encounter surveys (Heyer et al. 1994) with randomized walks (Lambert 1984) along forest trails, forest edges, and streams complemented with active searches (Rolfe and McKenzie 2000) in suitable habitats that included digging through leaf litter, turning rocks and logs, peeling bark (Das et al. 2009), and inspecting small shallow caves along forest streams. Habitats included roadsides, ponds, drains, old buildings, vegetation near streams, and arboreal situations.

We conducted both diurnal and nocturnal searches at six localities in all seasons from March 2021 to June 2022,

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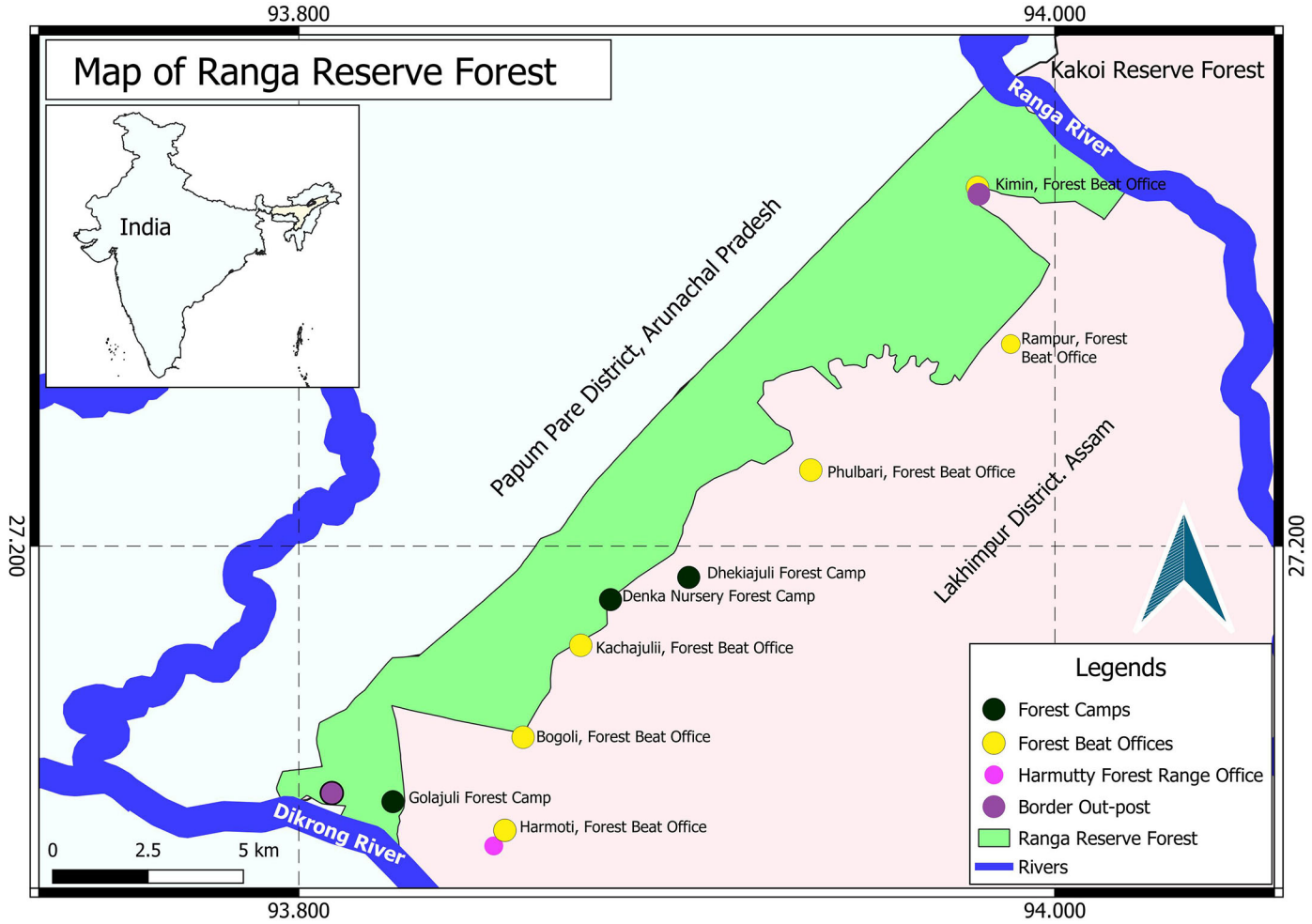

Figure 1. Map of the Ranga Reserve Forest, Lakhimpur, Assam, India.

surveying each site for nine hours each day (0600–1100 h and 1400–1800 h) four to five times per month. After dark, we used flashlights and headlamps. For each animal (including roadkills) encountered, we recorded locality, date, time, habitat, microhabitat, and behavior. For geographic coordinates we used a mobile android app (Note Cam) noting all sites on a map of the study area (Fig. 1) created using Q-GIS software version 3.18. Data were analyzed using Microsoft Office Excel 2007. Rescued individuals were identified and photographed before being released in suitable habitats.

We identified species by visual examination supplemented with color photographs using guides and keys by Smith (1931, 1935, 1943), Ahmed et al. (2009), Purkayastha (2013), Mirza et al. (2020), and Uetz et al. (2024).

Results

We recorded 60 species of amphibians and reptiles (Table 1), 13 anurans in five families (Bufonidae, Mycrohylidae, Rhacophoridae, Dicroglossidae, and Ranidae) and 11 genera (Fig. 2), 11 lizards in four families and nine genera (Fig. 3), 34 snakes in ten families and 23 genera (Fig. 4), and two turtles in one family and two genera (Fig. 5). Six species were listed in threatened categories on the IUCN Red List (IUCN 2025), one (Assam Roofed Turtle, *Pangshura sylhetensis*) is Critically Endangered (CR), two (Burmese Python, *Python bivittatus*; King Cobra, *Ophiophagus hannah*) are Vulnerable (VU), and three (Bengal Monitor, *Varanus bengalensis*; Indo-Chinese Ratsnake, *Ptyas korros*; Assam Leaf Turtle, *Cyclemys gemeli*) are Near-threatened (NT). Also, eight species listed in Schedule I and 30 in Schedule II are protected under the Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 2022 (Government of India 2024). Identifying any Schedule-I species in the study area underscores the need for stringent conservation measures and, although Schedule-II species receive less rigorous protection, the presence of such species can aid in implementing targeted conservation actions and legal protections.

Discussion

The number of herpetofaunal species we encountered speaks to the diverse habitats in the Ranga Reserve Forest (see also

Table 1. Annotated list of herpetofauna recorded in Ranga Reserve Forest, Assam, India, during the study period. WPA = Wildlife Protection Act (Government of India 2024): I = Schedule I, II = Schedule II, NS = Non Schedule. IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources), Red List of Threatened Species (IUCN 2025): NE = Not Evaluated, DD = Data Deficient, LC = Least Concern, NT = Near Threatened, VU = Vulnerable, CR = Critically Endangered.

No.	Taxon	Location (elevation in m)	WPA	IUCN
AMPHIBIA: ANURA				
Bufonidae				
1	Common Asian Toad (*Duttaphrynus melanostictus*)	27.1811, 93.8716 (146) 27.1483, 93.8578 (148) 27.1310, 93.8493 (140)	NS	LC
Microhylidae				
2	Narrow-mouthed Frog (*Microhyla* sp.)	27.1683, 93.8523 (184) 27.1576, 93.8252 (146) 27.2701, 93.9804 (165)	NS	—
3	Indian Balloon Frog (*Uperodon globulosus*)	27.1467, 93.8243 (204)	NS	LC
Rhacophoridae				
4	Two-striped Pigmy Treefrog (*Rohanixalus vittatus*)	27.1882, 93.8588	NS	LC
5	Treefrog (*Polypedates* sp.)	27.1318, 93.8493 (142) 27.1734, 93.8740 (150) 27.1572, 93.8590 (166)	NS	—
6	Large treefrog (?)	27.1767, 93.8724 (149)	—	—
Dicroglossidae				
7	Indian Skittering Frog (*Euphlyctis adolfi*)	27.1361, 93.8226 (191)	II	LC
8	Cricket Frog (*Fejervarya* sp.)	27.1425, 93.8216 (194) 27.1773, 93.8707 (148) 27.1677, 93.8617 (163)	NS	—
9	Jerdon's Bullfrog (*Hoplobatrachus crassus*)	27.1572, 93.8544 (170) 27.1408, 93.8168 (170)	NS	LC
10	Indian Bullfrog (*Hoplobatrachus tigerinus*)	27.1576, 93.8633 (147) °E	II	LC
Ranidae				
11	Bhamo Frog (*Humerana humeralis*)	27.1763, 93.8626 (167)	NS	LC
12	Theobald's Ranid Frog (*Hylarana tytleri*)	27.1750, 93.8649 (161)	NS	LC
13	Assam Forest Frog (*Hylarana leptoglossa*)	27.1711, 93.8467 (200) 27.1820, 93.8596 (188)	NS	LC
REPTILIA: SQUAMATA (lizards)				
Agamidae				
14	Indian Graden Lizard (*Calotes irawadi*)	27.1529, 93.8616 (145)	NS	LC
145m		Road side habitat along the forest edge.		
15	Blue-throated Lizard (*Ptyctolaemus gularis*)	27.1671, 93.8395 (211) 27.2718, 93.9858 (162) 27.1623, 93.8237 (300)	NS	LC
Gekkonidae				
16	Bent-toed Gecko (*Cyrtodactylus* sp.)	27.1471, 93.8238 (199)	II	—
17	Tokay Gecko (*Gekko gecko*)	27.1647, 93.8251 (283)	I	LC
18	Kushmore House Gecko (*Hemidactylus kushmorensis*)	27.1718, 93.8681 (153)	NS	DD
19	Flat-tailed Gecko (*Hemidactylus platyurus*)	27.1732, 93.8518 (186)	NS	LC
Scincidae				
20	Bronze Grass Skink (*Eutropis macularia*)	27.2698, 93.9886 (154)	NS	LC
21	Many-lined Grass Skink (*Eutropis multifasciata*)	27.1743, 93.8603 (173)	NS	LC
22	Spotted Litter Skink (*Sphenomorphus maculatus*)	27.1729, 93.8623 (161) 27.2793, 93.9872 (158) 27.1731, 93.8522 (187) 27.2707, 93.9795 (170)	NS	LC

23	White-spotted Supple Skink (*Riopa albopunctata*)	27.1819, 93.8563 (203)	NS	LC
Varanidae				
24	Bengal Monitor (*Varanus bengalensis*)	27.1374, 93.8209 (173)	I	NT
REPTILIA: SQUAMATA (snakes)				
Typhlopidae				
25	Brahminy Blindsnake (*Indotyphlops braminus*)	27.1354, 93.8125 (157)	II	LC
26	Diard's Blindsnake (*Argyrophis diardii*)	27.1756, 93.8708 (151)	II	LC
Pythonidae				
27	Burmese Python (*Python bivittatus*)	27.2752, 93.9839 (158)	I	VU
Colubridae				
28	Indian Ratsnake (*Ptyas mucosa*)	27.2766, 93.9915 (151)	I	LC
29	Indo-Chinese Ratsnake (*Ptyas korros*)	27.2784, 93.9713 (198)	II	NT
30	Copper-headed Trinket Snake (*Coelognathus radiatus*)	27.1811, 93.8638 (168)	II	LC
31	Common Trinket Snake (*Coelognathus helena*)	27.1929, 93.8637 (172)	II	LC
32	Eastern Trinket Snake (*Elaphe cantoris*)	27.1577, 93.8198 (287)	II	LC
33	Eastern Catsnake (*Boiga gocool*)	27.1483, 93.8127 (236)	II	NE
34	Thai Catsnake (*Boiga siamensis*)	27.2979, 93.9654 (288)	II	LC
35	Green Catsnake (*Boiga cyanea*)	27.1768, 93.8608 (174)	II	LC
36	Light-barred Kukri Snake (*Oligodon albocinctus*)	27.1518, 93.8439 (189)	II	LC
37	Black-barred Kukri Snake (*Oligodon cinereus*)	27.1864, 93.8558 (220)	II	LC
38	Cantor's Kukri Snake (*Oligodon cyclurus*)	27.1751, 93.8592 (175)	II	LC
39	Common Wolfsnake (*Lycodon aulicus*)	27.2646, 93.9949 (132)	II	LC
40	Zaw's Wolfsnake (*Lycodon zawi*)	27.1848, 93.8628 (170)	II	LC
41	Twin-spotted Wolfsnake (*Lycodon jara*)	27.1813, 93.8549 (204)	II	LC
Ahaetuliidae				
42	Painted Bronzeback (*Dendrelaphis proarchos*)	27.1871, 93.8587 (214)	II	NE
43	Yellow Whipsnake (*Ahaetulla flavescens*)	27.2762, 93.9858 (152)	II	NE
44	Ornate Flying Snake (*Chrysopelea ornata*)	27.1701, 93.8681 (149)	II	LC
Natricidae				
45	Buff-striped Keelback (*Amphiesma stolatum*)	27.1787, 93.8709 (148)	II	LC
46	Heller's Red-necked Keelback (*Rhabdophis helleri*)	27.2795, 93.9889 (159)	II	NE
47	Himalayan Keelback (*Rhabdophis himalayanus*)	27.1759, 93.8577 (176)	II	LC
48	Checkered Keelback (*Fowlea piscator*)	27.2670, 93.9861 (153)	I	LC
Psammodynastidae				
49	Common Mock Viper (*Psammodynastes pulverulentus*)	27.1707, 93.8583 (176)	NS	LC
Homalopsidae				
50	Rainbow Mudsnake (*Enhydris enhydris*)	27.1351, 93.8136 (155)	NS	LC
Pareidae				
51	Assam Snail Eater (*Pareas monticola*)	27.2677, 93.9892 (145)	NS	LC
Elapidae				
52	Monocled Cobra (*Naja kaouthia*)	27.2756, 93.9948 (149)	I	LC
53	Banded Krait (*Bungarus fasciatus*)	27.2793, 93.9755 (189)	II	LC
54	Lesser Black Krait (*Bungarus lividus*)	27.1395, 93.8222 (188)	II	LC
55	Greater Black Krait (*Bungarus niger*)	27.1837, 93.8623 (168)	II	LC
56	King Cobra (*Ophiophagus hannah*)	27.1565, 93.8273 (230)	I	VU
Viperidae				
57	Salazar Pitviper (*Trimeresurus salazar*)	27.1463, 93.8154 (229)	II	NE
58	Mountain Pitviper (*Ovophis monticola*)	27.1788, 93.8465 (245)	II	LC
REPTILIA: TESTUDINES: CRYPTODIRA				
Geoemydidae				
59	Assam Leaf Turtle (*Cyclemys gemeli*)	27.1583, 93.8537 (175)	II	NT
60	Assam Roofed Turtle (*Pangshura sylhetensis*)	27.1652, 93.8349 (223)	I	CR

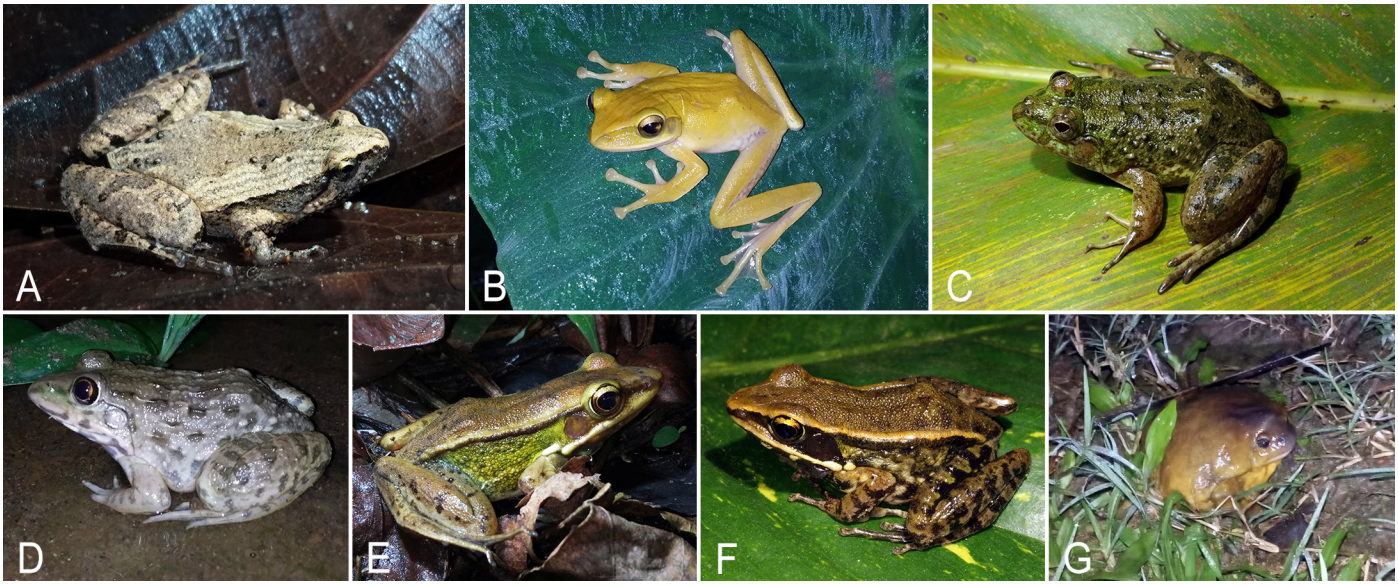

Figure 2. Anurans recorded in the Ranga Reserve Forest, Lakhimpur, Assam, India, during the study period: *Microhyla* sp. (A), *Polypedates* sp. (B), *Euphlyctis adolfi* (C), *Hoplobatrachus crassus* (D), *Humerana humeralis* (E), *Hylarana leptoglossa* (F), *Uperodon globulosus* (G). Photographs courtesy of the Assam Wildlife Rescue and Research Organization.

Figure 3. Lizards recorded in Ranga Reserve Forest, Lakhimpur, Assam, India, during the study period: *Calotes irawadi* (A), *Ptyctolaemus gularis* (B), *Cyrtodactylus* sp. (C), *Gekko gecko* (D), *Hemidactylus platyurus* (E), *Sphenomorphus maculatus* (F), *Varanus bengalensis* (G). Photographs courtesy of the Assam Wildlife Rescue and Research Organization.

Chetia et al. 2024). Many of the terrestrial species were hidden under leaf litter and, as expected, most amphibians were in moist microhabitats that included tree-holes, decaying logs, leaf litter, and temporary puddles in dense forests, habitats characterized not only by moisture but also by cooler temperatures. These observations were comparable to those of Das et al. (2009), Roy and Dey (2015), Lahkar et al. (2022), and Chetia et al. (2024).

Noteworthy anecdotal observations included a gravid female Flat-tailed Gecko (*Hemidactylus platyurus*) on 26 August 2021; Blue-throated Lizards (*Ptyctolaemus gularis*) frequently basking on tree branches and juveniles measuring 11–14 cm in total length; multiple Bent-toed Geckos (*Cyrtodactylus* sp.) in shallow caves along a seasonal stream indicating that this habitat is important for the species; and a decomposed snake (probably *Oligodon* sp.) along a riverbank with cylindrical eggs in its stomach.

We were unable to identify one large treefrog and some individuals (*Microhyla* sp., *Fejervarya* sp., *Cyrtodactylus* sp.) were identified only to genus, as their features did not align fully with those of known species. These indicate the potential existence of unidentified or inconspicuous species in the region, underscoring the necessity for further taxonomic investigations.

Figure 4. Snakes recorded in Ranga Reserve Forest, Lakhimpur, Assam, India, during the study period: *Indotyphlops brahminus* (A), *Ptyas korros* (B), *Boiga gocool* (C), *Boiga siamensis* (D), *Boiga cyanea* (E), *Ahaetulla flavescens* (F), *Rhabdophis helleri* (G), *Rhabdophis himalayanus* (H), *Oligodon albocinctus* (I), *Oligodon cinereus* (J), *Lycodon aulicus* (K), *Psammodynastes pulverulentus* (L), *Enhydris enhydris* (M), *Pareas* cf. *monticola* (N), *Naja kaouthia* (O), *Bungarus fasciatus* (P), *Bungarus lividus* (Q), *Ophiophagus hannah* (R), *Trimeresurus salazar* (S), *Ovophis monticola* (T). Photographs courtesy of the Assam Wildlife Rescue and Research Organization.

Figure 5. *Cyclemys gemeli*, one of two species of turtles recorded in the Ranga Reserve Forest, Lakhimpur, Assam, India, during the study period. Photograph courtesy of the Assam Wildlife Rescue and Research Organization.

Encroachment by local communities along the periphery of the Ranga Reserve Forest has resulted in habitat loss, primarily due to a reduction of forest cover, and might be responsible for the relatively low number of individuals of many species. Nevertheless, our surveys of this unexplored reserve forest have shed some light on the diversity and distribution of herpetofaunal species in the region. We suggest that further surveys in this biogeographically rich area likely will reveal the presence of additional species.

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