

First record of Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus* in Valmiki Tiger Reserve, Bihar, India.

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Nine species of vultures are found in the Indian subcontinent, seven of which are breeding residents, while two are non-breeding migrants, the Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus* and Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*. The Cinereous Vulture is classified as Near Threatened according to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (BirdLife International 2018), and occurs across a wide distribution range in Europe, Asia and North Africa. In South Asia the Cinereous Vulture is a breeding resident in arid to semi-arid mountains of Pakistan, and at lower altitudes in the Himalayas. The vulture uses forested areas in hills and mountains in Europe at elevations of 300-1,400 MSL, but it occurs at higher altitudes in Asia, where it also occupies scrub and arid and semi-arid alpine steppe and grasslands up to 4,500 MSL (Andevski *et al.* 2017). Nests are normally made in trees, sometimes on cliffs or even on the ground in areas that are not subjected to disturbance by human activities. It is a winter visitor in the north-western parts of India (Ali & Ripley 2007). However, over the years Cinereous Vulture occurrence has been recorded from several sites in various states of India in different habitat types such as thick forests, open terrain from Maharastra (Dudhe 2012), Telengana (Rao 2006), Karnataka (Subramanya 2001,

Biddappa 2017) Kerala (Rajeev 2017), Tamil Nadu (Gnanskandan 2008, Bharathidhasan 2017, Samson *et al.* 2019) and Andhra Pradesh (Perennou & Santharam 1990). The species has been well documented from the plains of north-east India (Ranade & Prakash 2021) and was sighted in the neighbouring state of Jharkhand by some birders during 2019 (Shiv Sahay Singh 2019).

In this note we report the first sighting of the Cinereous Vulture in Valmiki Tiger Reserve (VTR), Bihar, India, which lies between latitude 27°10'N and 27°30'N and longitude 83°50' E and 84°10'E in the north-eastern corner of India along the international border with Nepal (Figure 1). The reserve is bounded by Gandak River in the west. The tiger reserve is spread over an area of 901.13 km² of Terai Arc region and is very rich in biodiversity with many endemic and globally endangered species (Maurya & Birah 2013). The vegetation of VTR has been classified by Champion and Seth (1968) to Bhabar dun Sal forest, dry Siwalik Sal forest, west Gangetic moist mixed deciduous forest, Acacia-Dalbergia forest, cane brakes, eastern wet alluvial grassland and Barringtonia swamp forest. The VTR represents one of the last patches of forest with unique Terai-Bhabar vegetation (Johnsingh *et al.* 2004).

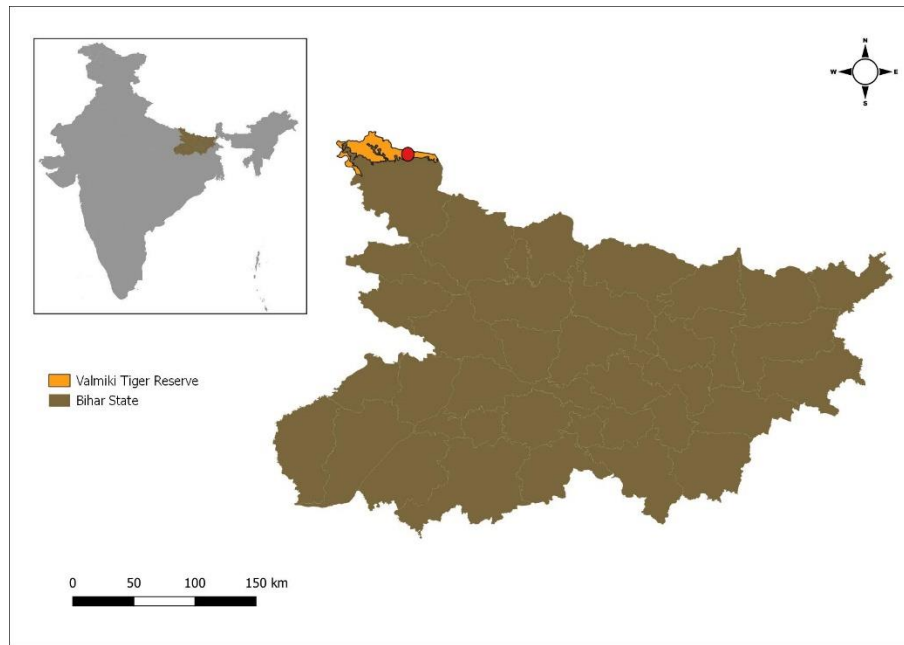


Figure 1: Map showing Valmiki Tiger Reserve in Bihar State, India, and the location of the sighting of the juvenile Cinereous Vulture on 2 December 2021 (red circle).

On 2 December 2021, while doing their routine patrolling duty, a team of tiger trackers came across a large bird along a stream in the Gobardhana range of the reserve, at a distance of 10 to 15 metres. As the bird was quite close and approachable, a tiger tracker recorded a video his mobile phone for later identification (extracted stills are shown in Figure 2; the original video can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/kZ-PU6wfxjo>) with. The bird was seen standing on the bank of the stream near a pool. When it became aware of the trackers, the bird started to walk away and waded across the pool with outstretched and partially submerged wings. The bird then stood on the bank for a few minutes before flying away. The video was later reviewed by experts and the bird was identified to be a juvenile Cinereous Vulture. Although there were no visible external injuries to the vulture, its behaviour seemed unusual due to its apparent lack of fear of people and the way that it waded through the water, rather than flying away. As the vulture

flew away and was not seen again, its condition could not be assessed further. It is possible that it was in poor condition due to hunger or another unknown cause.

Although four species of vultures including Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*, White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* and Himalayan Vulture *Gyps himalayensis* have been recorded in VTR, Cinereous Vulture was not recorded prior to this sighting. Therefore, we searched for available literature about sightings of Cinereous Vultures in the state of Bihar. Although no published reports were found, there was a single record of a Cinereous Vulture in West Champaran district in the eBird database (Nachiket Kelkar 2017). However, to our knowledge, the current sighting is the first record of the species from VTR, and the Cinereous Vulture is therefore a new species for the reserve.

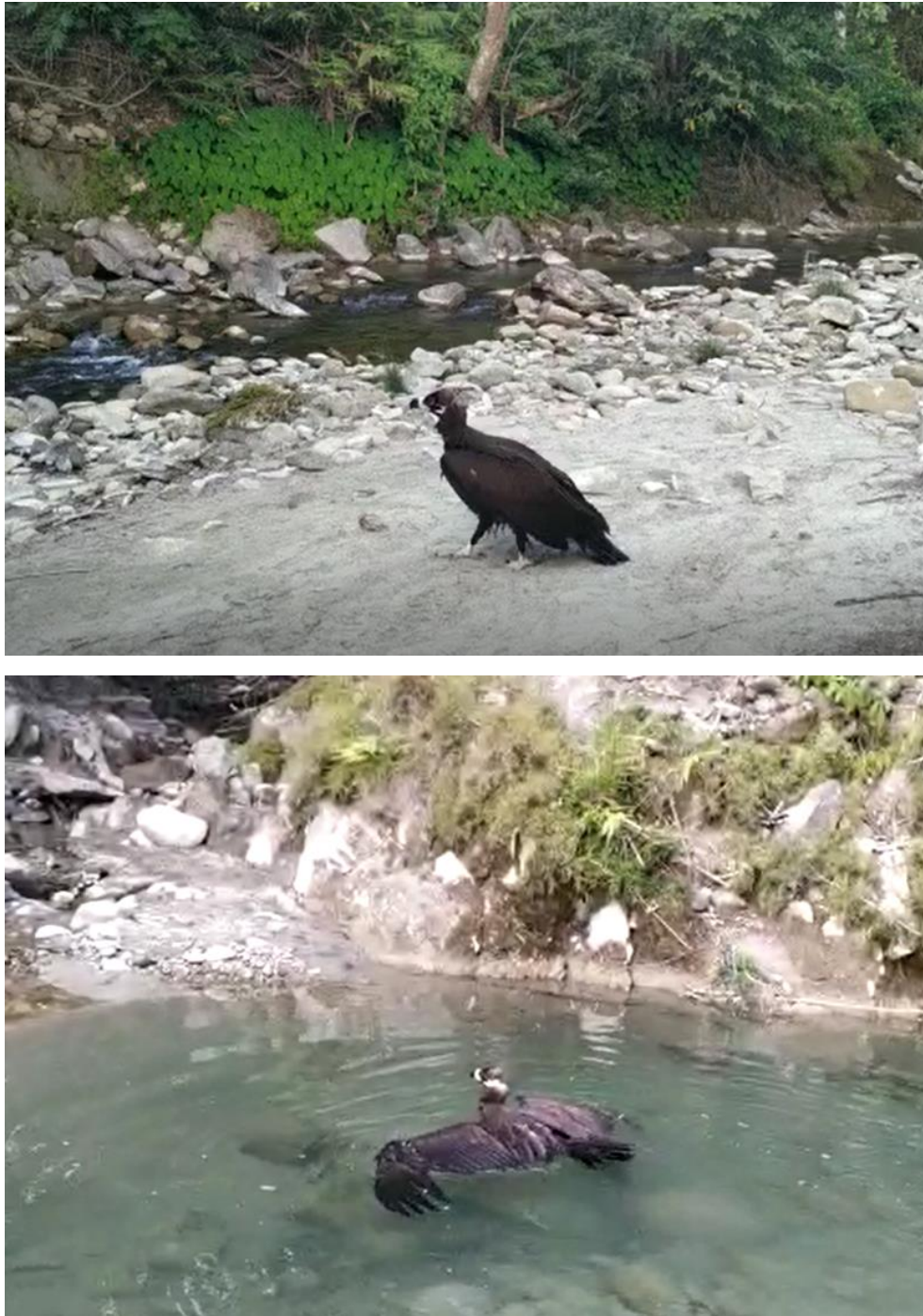


Figure 2: Still images extracted from a video of a juvenile Cinereous Vulture seen in Valmiki Tiger Reserve on 2 December 2021. The vulture was initially seen on the banks of a small stream before wading across a pool of water. The original video can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/kZ-PU6wfxjo>. The video was recorded by staff of Valmiki Tiger Reserve, Department of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Bihar, India.

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