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First report of albino rhesus macaque *Macaca mulatta* (Zimmerman, 1780) from Barak Valley, Assam

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On 22nd February 2022 at 10:30 hours, we recorded an albino rhesus macaque infant at Ramkrishna Nagar town (24°50'31.5708"N, 92°23'11.6916"E) in Sribhumi district of Assam (Figure 1). The locals knew the individual by its ethereal appearance and bestowed the name 'Pandur' (meaning pale, colorless) upon this unique and colorless primate. The monkey was spotted while it was feeding and roaming around the place with the group near the town. The group roamed the suburban town and adjacent areas in the quest for food. The group, consisting of approximately 72 members, including 24 offspring, 29 females, and 19 males, was the only rhesus macaque troop known to inhabit this vast area. Within the troop, the albino baby received constant care and protection from its mother, always staying near her (Figure 2). However, the albino baby faces some social challenges within the group. Other members of the group exhibited hesitation in interacting and playing with the albino individual, often displaying behaviors of irritation or avoidance. Nevertheless, the albino baby explored its surroundings under the watchful guidance of its mother, vocalizing frequently throughout its daily activities.

Even though the birth of an albino animal is considered a sacred or auspicious event in some cultures, research suggests that some albino animals have reduced fitness in the wild (Uieda, 2000; Hall, 2019). The lack of natural camouflage and increased susceptibility to environmental factors make them more prone to predation (Uieda, 2000). Consequently, the birth of an albino animal raises concerns about the ability of animals or animal groups to thrive and perpetuate their species in their natural habitats. Although rare in nature, albino animals have been spotted in diverse animals (Abreu *et al.*, 2013; Leroux *et al.*, 2022). Among the primate species, it was reported in the toque macaques *Macaca sinica* (Fooden, 1979), bonnet macaques *Macaca radiata* (Mahabal *et al.*, 2012), western lowland gorilla *Gorilla gorilla gorilla* (Prado-Martinez *et al.*, 2013) and black-handed spider monkey *Ateles geoffroyi* (Espinal *et al.*, 2016). With the exception of one or two accounts, the albino individuals were not found to interact with other members within their troops. Leroux *et al.* (2022) observed that the unique morphological features of an infant albino chimpanzee prompted infanticide by other members of the community in Budongo Forest Reserve, Uganda. In contrast, Montilla & Link (2022) found no discrimination in the conspicuous interaction of an albino Caribbean night monkey within the troop.

The expression of albinism in animal populations appears to be closely associated with specific ecological conditions and factors (Bensch *et al.*, 2000). Observations indicate that albinism tends to appear more in areas where animal group densities are relatively low or in decline (Bensch *et al.*, 2000). Furthermore, continuous inbreeding has been identified as a contributing factor to the expression of albinism within populations (Bensch *et al.*, 2000). Albinism serves as an important warning signal, highlighting potential challenges to long-term continuity and genetic health of a species population. Thus, it is needed to monitor the populations regularly for albinism and genetic or morphological anomalies. Such monitoring can help keep an eye on the health of the wild populations. Additionally, creating awareness among local communities about how to coexist harmoniously with non-human primates is of utmost importance.

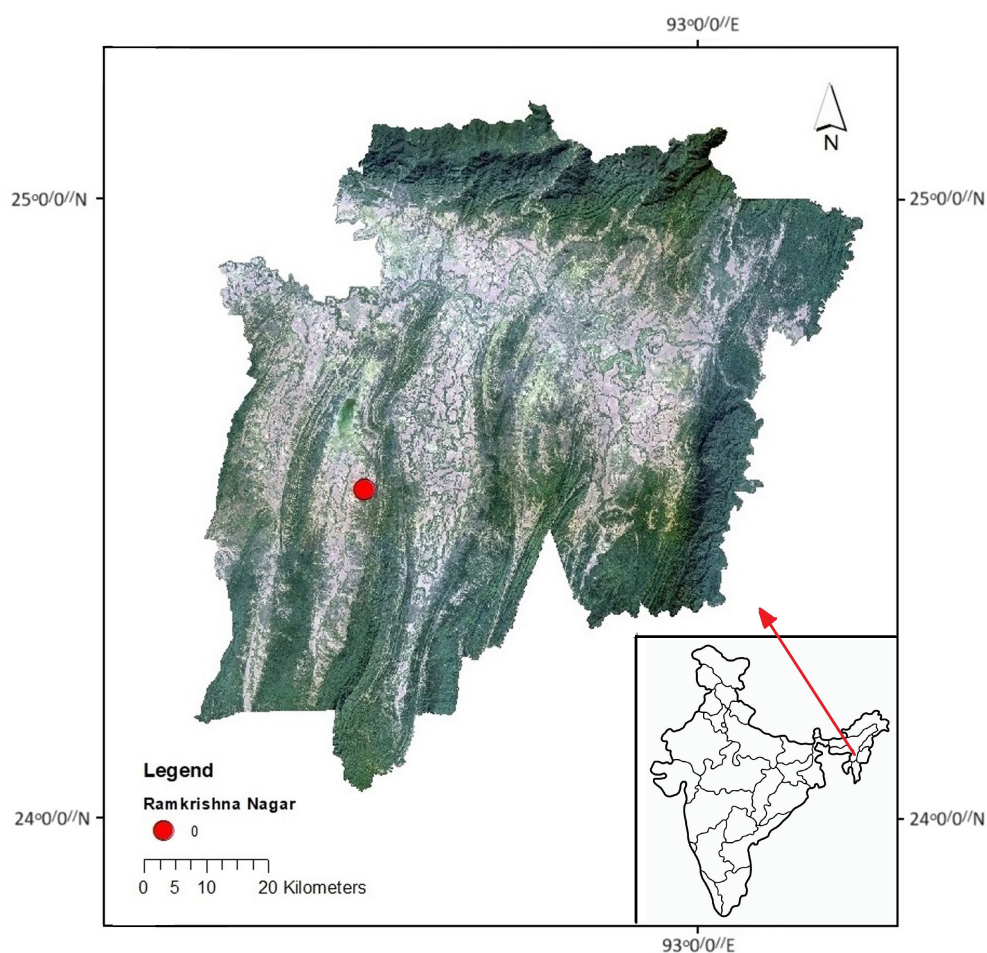


Figure 1. Sighting location of albino rhesus macaque in Ramkrishna Nagar, Sribhumi, Assam, India

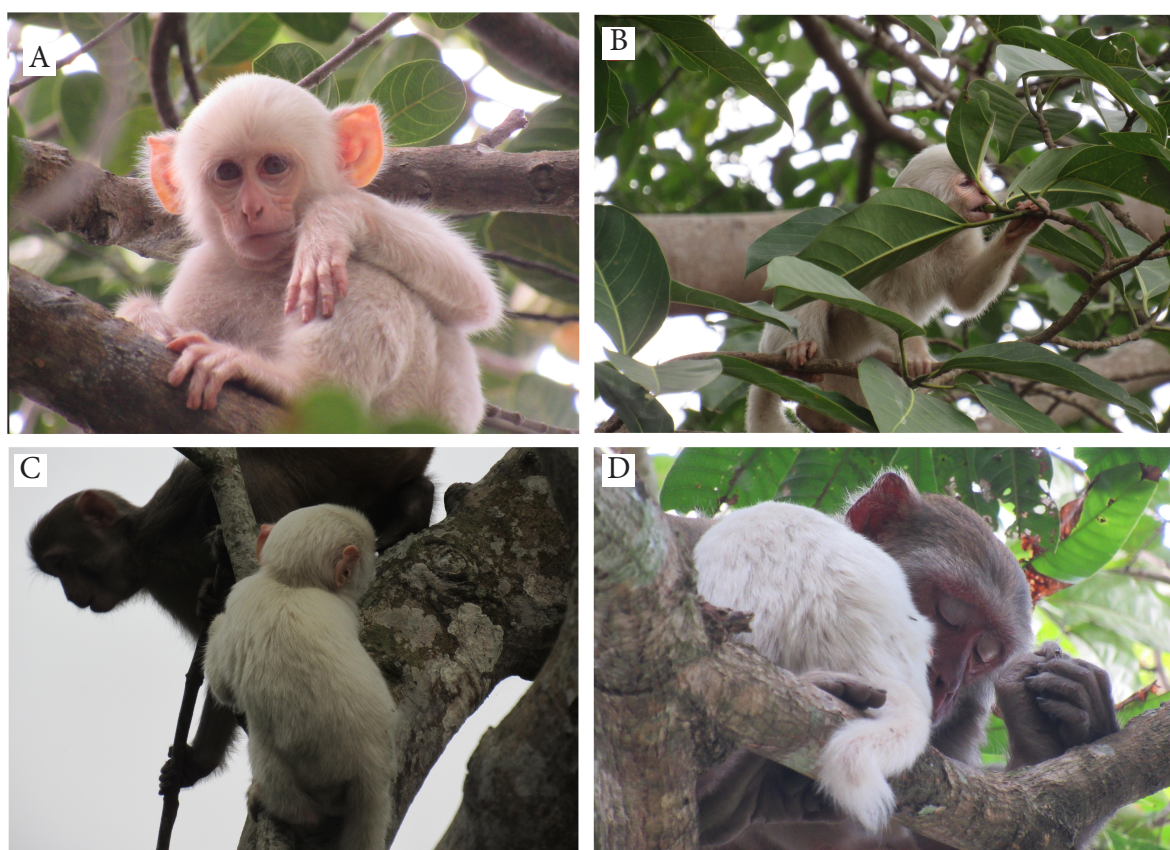


Figure 2. Juvenile albino rhesus macaque individual. A. frontal view, B: feeding on fruits of a banyan tree, C: playing with other members of the troop, D: albino offspring and the mother female sleeping on a branch.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY

Data is available in the manuscript.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

BS and NRT conceived and designed the study. BS and NRT carried out field study. BS, NRT and BS analysed the data. BS & NRT wrote the first draft of the MS. PC reviewed and edited the final draft.

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