Burrows of biodiversity: faunal associations with Chinese pangolin habitats in the Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary, West Bengal, India

Priyanka Rai[1], Ratnadeep Sarkar[1], Rhea Ganguly[2] and Sunita Pradhan[1,*]

[1]Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment, The Himalaya Initiative, Gangtok 737 102, India

[2]Office of the Divisional Forest Officer, Jaldapara Wildlife Division, West Bengal Forest Directorate, Alipurduar 735 220, India

Pangolins (*Manis pentadactyla*), globally threatened and a wildlife trade icon, remain ecologically understudied. As burrowing mammals, they act as ecosystem engineers, modifying soil and habitat structure, enhancing ecosystem functions. We examined fauna associated with 19 fresh burrows in Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary, West Bengal, using 13 camera traps from December 2023 to August 2024 (2401 trap nights). Thirty-four faunal species were recorded, including 17 mammals, 15 birds, 1 reptile, and 1 amphibian. Activity occurred across the diel cycle (46.4% nocturnal, 34% diurnal). Faunal use of the burrows occurred across time, habitat, and behaviour. Pangolin burrows enhance habitat complexity and support diverse fauna, underscoring their importance for integrated conservation.

Keywords: Associated fauna, burrows, Chinese pangolin, ecological interactions, Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary, *Manis pentadactyla*.