

Distribution and Habitat Preference of Red Panda (*Ailurus Fulgens Fulgens*) in Jumla District, Nepal

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Abstract : Reliable and sufficient information regarding status, distribution and habitat preference of red panda (*Ailurus fulgens fulgens*) is lacking in Nepal. The research activities on red panda in the mid-western Nepal are very limited, so the status of red panda in the region is quite unknown. The study conducted during May, 2013 in three Village Development Committees (VDCs) namely Godhemahadev, Malikathata and Tamti of Jumla district was an important step for providing vital information including distribution and habitat preference of this species. The study included the reconnaissance, key informants survey, interviews, and consultation for the most potential area identification, opportunistic survey comprising the direct observation and indirect sign count method for the presence and distribution, habitat assessment consisting vegetation sampling and ocular estimation. The study revealed the presence of red panda in three forests namely Bahirepatan, Imilchadamar and Tyakot of Godhemahadev, Tamti and Malikathata VDCs respectively. The species was found distributed between 2880 and 3244 m with an average dropping encounter rate of 1.04 per hour of searching effort and 12 pellets per dropping. Red panda mostly preferred the habitat in the elevation range of 2900 - 3000 m with southwest facing steep slopes (36° - 45°), associated with water sources at the distance of ≤ 100 m. Trees such as *Acer* spp., *Betula utilis* and *Quercus semecarpifolia*, shrub species of *Elaeagnus parvifolia*, *Drepanostachyum* spp. and *Jasminum humile*, and the herbs like *Polygonatum cirrhifolium*, *Fragaria nubicola* and *Galium asperifolium* were found to be the most preferred species by red panda. The red panda preferred the habitat with dense crown coverage ($>20\%$ - 100%) and 31% - 50% ground cover. Fallen logs (39%) were the most preferred substrate used for defecation.

Keywords : distribution, habitat preference, jumla, red panda

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