

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

**DETERIORATION OF THE HABITAT OF THE MOUPIN PIKA,
OCHOTONA THIBETANA SIKIMARIA THOMAS, IN SIKKIM, INDIA**

Ochotona thibetana sikimaria Thomas is known in India from a few localities like Lachung (alt. c 2622 m) and Lachne (alt. c 2865 m) only in North Sikkim. We visited Lachung and Lachen in 1979, 1981 and 1982, in connexion with the topotype collection of the Mòupin Pika and study of its ecology. In course of the field work in North Sikkim in 1983, we had occasion to revisit Lachung and returned with gloomy hearts. During our short stay there, we noticed a great change in the ecological condition of the area from what we had seen earlier. The forest zone was completely denuded of vegetation and replaced by human habitation all over. The forest areas on the western slope of Lachung Chu (between 2.5 and 5 km of the forest Rest House) was also destroyed by a massive landslide in September, 1982. On the whole, we had shocking experience. The beautiful area consisting of glades of social grasses, thickets of rhododendron, the preferred habitat of the Moupin Pika (*O. t. sikimaria*), and larger trees (mainly first) with thick growth of mosses and ferns, which used to give cover to the Himalayan Langur (*Presbytes entellus schistaceus*) and the Red Panda (*Ailurus fulgens*) of that area had vanished for ever (Pl. 1).

It may be mentioned that a large area of the forest zone on the eastern bank of Lachung Chu (= river) and some 2 sq.km. area on the western bank of the river up to the Forest Rest House were deforested long back for human settlement, terraced cultivation, firewood collection, road construction, etc. The habitat of the Moupin Pika in the other area, i.e., Lachen, is also highly disturbed for a long time for various reasons.

The status of the Moupin Pika appears to be some concern to us, due to deterioration of its habitat.

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