



“Surprise, I have a mate”: Behavioural observation of the Indian Giant Flying Squirrel *Petaurista philippensis* (Elliot 1839) in the Kevdi Eco-camp site, Chhota-Udepur, Gujarat

Out of the 18 species of flying squirrels (Koli & Bhatnagar 2016) the Indian Giant Flying Squirrel (IGFS) *Petaurista philippensis* is one of the 13 flying squirrels found in the Indian subcontinent. The IGFS inhabits in the elevation range of 180–2,300 m in the deciduous, mixed deciduous, and moist evergreen forests (Prater 1980). IGFS was found to be confined in the eastern belt of Gujarat but is well populated in central Gujarat compared to other regions of the state (Singh & Dharaiya 2021).



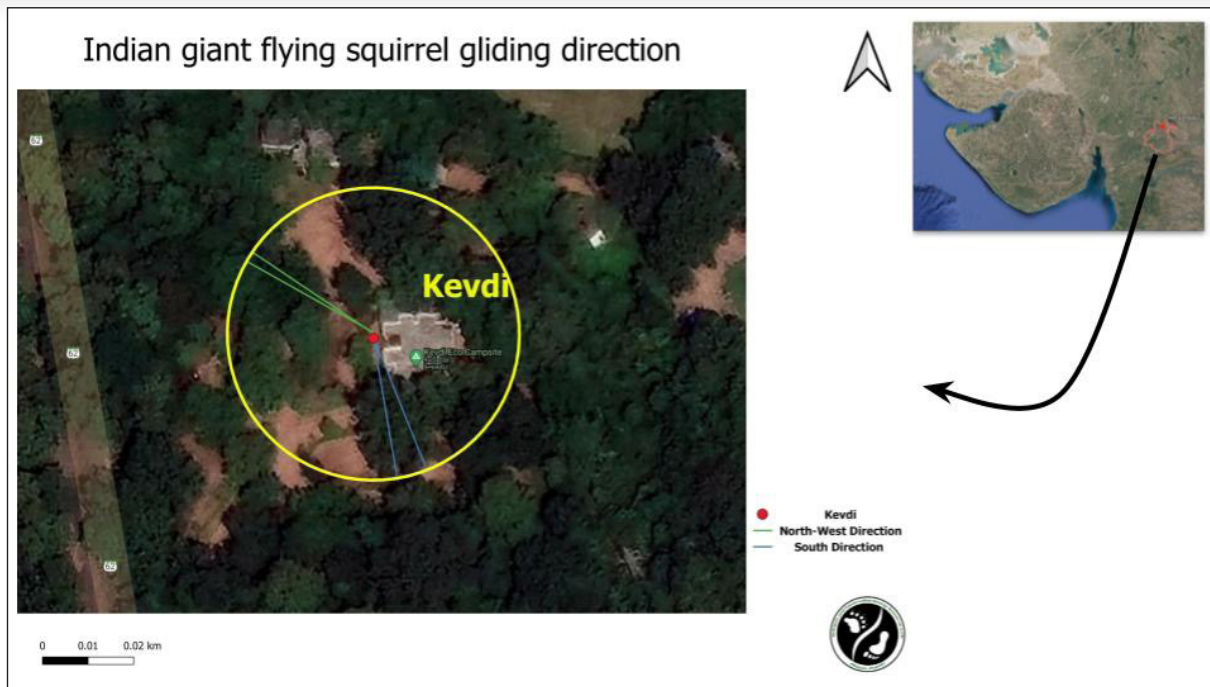
Sighting of the mating pair of IGFS. © Pratik Desai.

As part of the on-going project on Sloth Bear corridor and outreach in central Gujarat, we have been conducting regular sign surveys for Sloth Bear in different parts. The present surprised mating pair of the flying squirrel is observed at Kevdi Eco-camp site located

in Chhota-Udepur District. The team was aware about the IGFS presence in the camp and made regular dusk visit around that location where the squirrel was found regularly gliding from a Mahua *Madhuca longifolia* tree to other trees.

IGFS is an arboreal nocturnal mammal spending most of the day time sleeping in the tree cavities or holes (Prater 2005).

They emerge from their nest cavities 20–45 minutes after sunset (Sharma 2007) and



Map showing gliding (north-west and south) direction of the Indian Giant Flying Squirrel in the Kevdi-eco camp site.

they can glide more than 30 m, but prefers short glides (10–20 m) (Koli et al. 2011).

From 20 January 2021 till 1 February 2021, we observed single squirrel gliding from the resident Mahua tree and gliding on another Mahua tree between dusk (1840–1900 h). A single flying squirrel was observed gliding in the north-west and south direction regularly on alternate days.

The degree of the movement was observed in between 299°NW to 303°NW and 158°S to 170°S direction. On 2 February we observed two squirrels grooming for the first time in these 11 days of the observation. Early summer is considered as the breeding season for IGFS in India (Zacharias & Bhardwaj 1997; Koli et al. 2011). Referring Koli et al. (2011), we concluded the observation was of a mating pair of

the squirrel. Later, on 12 March 2021, we observed same mating pair grooming each other for few minutes and later gliding in the 299°NW to 303°NW direction. Mating pair spends more time in scrutinizing surroundings after emerging out of the cavity after the sunset.

Globally, IGFS is categorized as a species of Least Concern (Walston et al. 2016), and Near Threatened in southern Asia (Molur et al. 2005). It is a Schedule II species according to the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (Molur et al. 2005). Habitat fragmentation is one of the major reasons for the decrease in abundance of arboreal mammals and isolation of many species into small population (Umapathy & Kumar 2000). Although its status is ‘Least Concern’ globally, the species should be protected in western India, as its distribution range



is shrinking over time and the population trend is unknown. A detailed scientific study on its breeding biology and threats to the population may help in formulating conservation strategies for this species and its habitat.

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