

RECENT RECORD OF OTOMOPS WROUGHTONI
(THOMAS, 1913) (CHIROPTERA: MOLOSSIDAE)
FROM MEGHALAYA, NORTH-EAST INDIA

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Otomops wroughtoni (THOMAS, 1913) was named on the basis of about 30 specimens collected from Barapede Caves, 0.5 km from Talewadi village in Karnataka, south-west India (approx. 15°25'N, 74°22'E). This site was subsequently described by PRATER (1914), BROSET (1962) and BATES *et al.* (1994) but was revisited only intermittently during the 20th century (DANIEL *et al.* 1992). Until recently, *O. wroughtoni* was thought to be restricted to this single location (BATES & HARRISON 1997). However, in December, 2000 an additional specimen was collected in Chhiep District, Cambodia (13°59'N, 105°16'E) (WALSTON & BATES 2001). This represented a range extension eastwards of some 3200 km.

Key words: *Otomops wroughtoni*, Molossidae, Chiroptera, India

In March, 2001, during a bat survey in Meghalaya, north-east India a further specimen of *O. wroughtoni* was collected by the senior author. This locality, near Nongtraï village, Shella confederacy (25°11'N, 91°37'E), lies midway between the previous two locality records, approximately 2080 km north-east of the colony in Karnataka and 1920 km north-west of the record from Cambodia.

The single specimen was collected at 19.15 hours on 17 March, 2001. It was caught in a harp trap as it tried to enter the large limestone Phrang Karuh Cave, which is situated at an altitude of 170 metres on the southern fringes of the Shillong plateau in the East Khasi Hill District. The local vegetation is tropical semi-evergreen forest with a high plant diversity including lianas, cane, ferns, herbs, epiphytes and trees such as *Ficus* sp., *Trema* sp., *Hibiscus macrophyllus*, *Gmelina* sp., *Albizia* sp., *Wallichina* sp., Rubiaceae sp. and wild banana. Cultivated areas in the vicinity include cash crops such as beetlenut, bay leaf, broom, and pepper.

The adult male specimen (Field number: 20.1) is held in the Zoological Survey of India's (ZSI) Shillong zoological collection. It is similar in size and morphology to those from Talewadi and Cambodia described by BATES and HARRISON (1997) and WALSTON and HARRISON (2001) respectively. Its measurements are: forearm 67 mm; tibia 19.5 mm; foot 13.1 mm; tail 43.4 mm; ear 36 mm; greatest length of skull 26.1 mm; condylo-canine length 22.7 mm; zygomatic

breadth 13.8 mm; breadth of braincase 11.2 mm; upper toothrow length (CM³) 9.2 mm; lower toothrow length (CM₃) 9.8 mm; posterior palatal width taken at the widest point of the crowns of M³ 9.7 mm.

The recent discovery of *O. wroughtoni* in north-east India is of particular zoogeographical interest. At 25°11'N, it is the most northerly record of the genus, nearly 10° north of *O. martiensseni* (MATSCHIE, 1897) in Yemen (15°28'N; AL-JUMAILY 1999) and *O. wroughtoni* (15°25'N) in Karnataka. It also provides further evidence that *Otomops* is far more widespread in southern Asia than previously thought and with a less disjunct distribution.

Currently, *O. wroughtoni* is listed as one of the 15 most critically endangered bat species (HUTSON *et al.* 2001). This was based primarily on the fact that only one roosting colony has ever been located and that it is extremely vulnerable to disturbance and/or destruction. However, if current molecular studies support the view that the specimens from Cambodia, north-east and south-west India are of the same taxon, this status may have to be reviewed. Such studies may also be of considerable interest in determining the relationship between all six, allopatric, widely distributed but poorly known species within the genus (*sensu* WALSTON & BATES 2001) currently described from Africa, Arabia, Asia and Australasia.

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