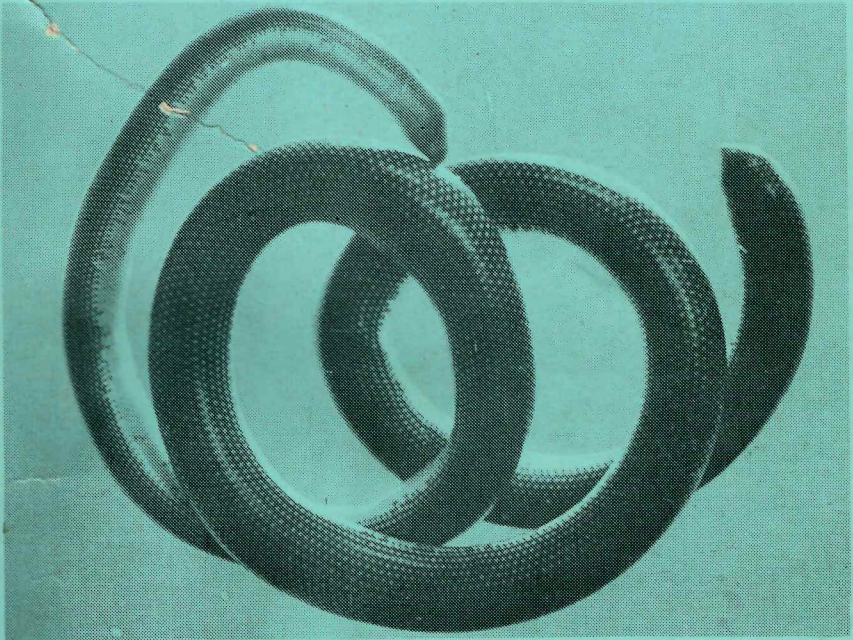


Cobra

Volume - 43

January - March 2001



*Quarterly Newsletter
of the Chennai Snake Park Trust*

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Cover

A 66cm. long beaked blind snake (*Typhlops acutus*) from Kerala
(Details on page 21)

Photo : Courtesy Zoological Survey of India

*How delightful and magnificent a living thing
is! How exactly matched to its condition, how
true, how intensely being! And how much I'm
helped by the small amount of study I've done
and how I look forward to taking it further!"*

*-Johann Wolfgang von Goethe,
diary entry, 9th October, 1786.*

Dr. V.Krishnamurthy honoured

The Venu Menon Lifetime Achievement Award, 2001 was presented to Dr. V.Krishnamurthy, the eminent veterinarian, by Shri. R. Venkataraman, former President of India, at a function at New Delhi on 19th Feb, 2001. The Award is instituted by the Venu Menon Animal Allies Foundation, New Delhi.

The citation read as follows:



“Dr. V.Krishnamurthy is a legend in the field of elephant veterinary care. For the past three decades, Dr. Krishnamurthy has used his veterinary skills to work tirelessly for captive and wild elephant welfare in southern India. Working out of the Tamil Nadu Forest Department, he has played a sterling role in the animal welfare standards set by the Mudumalai Elephant Camp. The governments of several Indian states and neighbouring

Asian countries have called upon Dr. Krishnamurthy to help in wild elephant tranquilisation and captive elephant care. His life-long dedication to elephants has inspired a whole generation of elephant lovers, conservationists and veterinarians”.

Dr. Krishnamurthy's name had been sponsored for the award by the Chennai Snake Park Trust among other wildlife and animal welfare organisations.

The Chennai Snake Park Trust is privileged to have Dr. Krishnamurthy on its Board of Trustees and wishes him many more years of dedicated work on animal care.

- Chairman
Chennai Snake Park Trust.

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**AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES OF THE TAMIL NADU
EASTERN AND WESTERN GHATS**

R.J. Ranjit Daniels

Care Earth

Shrinivas, No 5, 21st Street

Thillaiganganagar, Chennai - 600 061

The state of Tamil Nadu is endowed with a rich diversity of ecosystems. These include an extensive coastal ecosystem – beaches, mangroves and estuaries, riparian deltas, an elevated plateau, the Eastern and the Western Ghats. Whereas much of the state's topography is flat and near sea level, the Eastern Ghats rise to nearly 1800 m and the Western Ghats reach a maximum altitude of 2600 m ASL. Such topographic diversity, enriched by local climatic variations, has provided habitats to over 800 species of vertebrates. These 800 species, however, do not include the fishes, reptiles, birds and mammals that primarily inhabit the sea and the coastal ecosystem.

The high diversity of non-marine vertebrates in Tamil Nadu is largely due to the habitats provided by the Eastern and the Western Ghats. Sixty-three species of amphibians and 143 species of reptiles are known from these hills in the state. Of these 39 species (62%) of amphibians and 81 species (57%) of reptiles are endemic to southern India. The complete list of amphibians and reptiles known from the hills of Tamil Nadu till date is given below.



Class	Order/Family	Species	Status
Amphibians	Bufonidae	1. <i>Bufo beddomii</i>	E
		2. <i>Bufo fergusonii</i>	
		3. <i>Bufo hololius</i>	E
		4. <i>Bufo melanostictus</i>	
		5. <i>Bufo microtypanum</i>	
		6. <i>Bufo parietalis</i>	E
	Microhylidae	7. <i>Melanobatrachus indicus</i>	E
		8. <i>Ramanella anamalaiensis</i>	E
		9. <i>Ramanella montana</i>	
		10. <i>Ramanella triangularis</i>	
		11. <i>Ramanella variegata</i>	
		12. <i>Kaloula taprobanica</i>	
		13. <i>Microhyla ornata</i>	
		14. <i>Microhyla rubra</i>	
		15. <i>Uperodon systoma</i>	
		Ranidae	16. <i>Micrixalus fuscus</i>
	17. <i>Micrixalus opisthorhodus</i>		E
	18. <i>Micrixalus saxicolus</i>		E
	19. <i>Micrixalus thampii</i>		E
	20. <i>Nyctibatrachus beddomii</i>		E
	21. <i>Nyctibatrachus aliciae</i>		E
	22. <i>Nyctibatrachus major</i>		E
	23. <i>Nyctibatrachus vasanthi</i>		E
	24. <i>Rana beddomii</i>		E
	25. <i>Rana brachytarsus</i>		E
	26. <i>Rana brevipalmata</i>		E
	27. <i>Rana crassa</i>		
	28. <i>Rana curtipes</i>		E
	29. <i>Rana cyanophlyctis</i>		
	30. <i>Rana diplosticta</i>		E
	31. <i>Rana hexadactyla</i>		
	32. <i>Rana keralensis</i>		E
	33. <i>Rana nilagirica</i>		E
	34. <i>Rana leptodactylus</i>		E
	35. <i>Rana phrynoderma</i>		E
	36. <i>Rana aurantiaca</i>		



Class	Order/Family	Species	Status		
		37. <i>Rana limnocharis</i>			
		38. <i>Rana malabarica</i>			
		39. <i>Rana semipalmata</i>	E		
		40. <i>Rana temporalis</i>			
		41. <i>Rana tigerina</i>			
		42. <i>Tomopterna breviceps</i>			
		43. <i>Tomopterna rufescens</i>	E		
		44. <i>Tomopterna rolandae</i>			
		Rhacophoridae	45. <i>Philautus chalazodes</i>	E	
			46. <i>Philautus charius</i>	E	
			47. <i>Philautus femoralis</i>		
			48. <i>Philautus glandulosus</i>	E	
			49. <i>Philautus temporalis</i>		
			50. <i>Philautus signatus</i>	E	
			51. <i>Philautus variabilis</i>		
			52. <i>Polypedates maculatus</i>		
			53. <i>Polypedates pseudocruciger</i>	E	
			54. <i>Rhacophorus lateralis</i>	E	
			55. <i>Rhacophorus calcadensis</i>	E	
			56. <i>Rhacophorus malabaricus</i>	E	
			57. <i>Rhacophorus pleurostictus</i>	E	
			58. <i>Rhacophorus pseudomalabaricus</i>	E	
		Ichthyophidae	59. <i>Ichthyophis beddomei</i>	E	
			60. <i>Ichthyophis peninsularis</i>	E	
			61. <i>Uraeotyphlus malabaricus</i>	E	
			62. <i>Uraeotyphlus oxyurus</i>	E	
		Caecilidae	63. <i>Gegeneophis carnosus</i>	E	
		Reptiles	Gekkonidae	1. <i>Geckoella collegalensis</i>	
				2. <i>Cnemaspis indica</i>	E
				3. <i>Cnemaspis ornata</i>	E
				4. <i>Cnemaspis sisparensis</i>	E
				5. <i>Cnemaspis beddomei</i>	E
6. <i>Cnemaspis mysoriensis</i>	E				
7. <i>Cnemaspis kandiana</i>					



Class	Order/Family	Species	Status
		8. <i>Cnemaspis gracilis</i>	
		9. <i>Cnemaspis jerdoni</i>	
		10. <i>Cnemaspis littoralis</i>	E
		11. <i>Hemidactylus anamallensis</i>	E
		12. <i>Hemidactylus maculatus</i>	
		13. <i>Hemidactylus triedrus</i>	
		14. <i>Hemidactylus brooki</i>	
		15. <i>Hemidactylus frenatus</i>	
		16. <i>Hemidactylus leschenaulti</i>	
		17. <i>Hemidactylus reticulatus</i>	
		18. <i>Hemidactylus scabriceps</i>	
		19. <i>Hemidactylus giganteus</i>	
		20. <i>Hemiphyllodactylus aurantiacus</i>	E
	Agamidae	21. <i>Draco dussumieri</i>	E
		22. <i>Sitana ponticeriana</i>	
		23. <i>Otocryptis beddomii</i>	E
		24. <i>Salea horsfieldi</i>	E
		25. <i>Salea anamallayana</i>	E
		26. <i>Calotes versicolor</i>	
		27. <i>Calotes calotes</i>	
		28. <i>Calotes andamanensis</i>	E
		29. <i>Calotes grandisquamis</i>	E
		30. <i>Calotes nemoricola</i>	E
		31. <i>Calotes ellioti</i>	E
		32. <i>Calotes rouxi</i>	E
		33. <i>Psammophilus dorsalis</i>	E
		34. <i>Psammophilus blanfordanus</i>	
	Chameleonidae	35. <i>Chameleon zeylanicus</i>	
	Scincidae	36. <i>Mabuya beddomii</i>	
		37. <i>Mabuya carinata</i>	
		38. <i>Mabuya gansi</i>	E
		39. <i>Mabuya macularius</i>	
		40. <i>Mabuya trivittata</i>	
		41. <i>Dasia subcaeruleum</i>	E
		42. <i>Scincella beddomei</i>	E



Class	Order/Family	Species	Status
		43. <i>Scincella bilineatum</i>	E
		44. <i>Scincella laterimaculatum</i>	E
		45. <i>Scincella palnicum</i>	E
		46. <i>Scincella travancoricum</i>	E
		47. <i>Lygosoma dussumieri</i>	
		48. <i>Riopa punctata</i>	
		49. <i>Ristella beddomii</i>	E
		50. <i>Ristella guentheri</i>	E
		51. <i>Ristella rurki</i>	E
		52. <i>Ristella travancoria</i>	E
	Lacertidae	53. <i>Cabrila leschenaulti</i>	
		54. <i>Ophisops beddomei</i>	E
	Varanidae	55. <i>Varanus bengalensis</i>	
	Crocodylidae	56. <i>Crocodylus palustris</i>	
	Bataguridae	57. <i>Geoemyda sylvatica</i>	E
		58. <i>Melanochelys trijuga</i>	
	Testudinidae	59. <i>Geochelone elegans</i>	
		60. <i>Indotestudo forstenii</i>	E
	Tryonichidae	61. <i>Lissemys punctata</i>	
		62. <i>Trionyx leithii</i>	E
	Typhlopidae	63. <i>Typhlops porrectus</i>	
		64. <i>Rhamphotyphlops braminus</i>	
		65. <i>Typhlops thurstoni</i>	E
		66. <i>Typhlops tindalli</i>	E
	Uropeltidae	67. <i>Melanophidium punctatum</i>	E
		68. <i>Platyplecturus trilineatus</i>	E
		69. <i>Platyplecturus madurensis</i>	E
		70. <i>Brachyophidium rhodogaster</i>	E
		71. <i>Teretrurus sanguineus</i>	E
		72. <i>Plecturus perroteti</i>	E
		73. <i>Plecturus guentheri</i>	E
		74. <i>Uropeltis ellioti</i>	E
		75. <i>Uropeltis arcticeps</i>	E
		76. <i>Uropeltis ocellatus</i>	E
		77. <i>Uropeltis woodmasoni</i>	E
		78. <i>Uropeltis ceylanicus</i>	
		79. <i>Uropeltis rubromaculatus</i>	E



Class	Order/Family	Species	Status
		80. <i>Uropeltis myhendrae</i>	E
		81. <i>Uropeltis broughami</i>	E
		82. <i>Uropeltis nitidus</i>	E
		83. <i>Uropeltis dindigalensis</i>	E
		84. <i>Uropeltis beddomii</i>	E
		85. <i>Uropeltis macrorhynchus</i>	E
		86. <i>Uropeltis rubrolineatus</i>	E
		87. <i>Uropeltis maculatus</i>	E
		88. <i>Uropeltis petersi</i>	E
		89. <i>Uropeltis liura</i>	E
		90. <i>Uropletis pulneyensis</i>	E
		91. <i>Uropeltis smithi</i>	E
		92. <i>Rhinophis sanguineus</i>	E
	Boidae	93. <i>Python molurus</i>	
		94. <i>Eryx conicus</i>	
		95. <i>Eryx johni</i>	
	Dipsadidae	96. <i>Lycodon travancorensis</i>	E
		97. <i>Lycodon aulicus</i>	
		98. <i>Lycodon striatus</i>	
		99. <i>Oligodon venustus</i>	E
		100. <i>Oligodon arnensis</i>	
		101. <i>Oligodon brevicauda</i>	E
		102. <i>Oligodon affinis</i>	
		103. <i>Oligodon nikhili</i>	E
		104. <i>Dryocalamus nympha</i>	E
		105. <i>Dryocalamus gracilis</i>	E
		106. <i>Xylophis perroteti</i>	E
		107. <i>Xylophis stenorhynchus</i>	E
		108. <i>Sibnyophis subpunctatus</i>	
	Natricidae	109. <i>Amphiesma stolata</i>	
		110. <i>Amphiesma beddomei</i>	E
		111. <i>Amphiesma monticola</i>	E
		112. <i>Macropisthodon plumbicolor</i>	
		113. <i>Xenochrophis piscator</i>	
		114. <i>Atretium schistosum</i>	
	Colubridae	115. <i>Elaphe helena</i>	
		116. <i>Ptyas mucosus</i>	



Class	Order/Family	Species	Status
		117. <i>Argyrogena fasciolatus</i>	
		118. <i>Liopeltis calamaria</i>	
		119. <i>Dendrelaphis pictus</i>	
		120. <i>Dendrelaphis grandoculus</i>	E
		121. <i>Dendrelaphis tristis</i>	
		122. <i>Chrysopelea ornata</i>	
		123. <i>Ahaetulla perroteti</i>	E
		124. <i>Ahaetulla dispar</i>	E
		125. <i>Ahaetulla nasutus</i>	
		126. <i>Ahaetulla pulverulentus</i>	E
	Homalopsidae	127. <i>Boiga trigonata</i>	
		128. <i>Boiga ceylonensis</i>	
		129. <i>Boiga forsteni</i>	
		130. <i>Enhydris sieboldi</i>	
	Elaphidae	131. <i>Bungarus caeruleus</i>	
		132. <i>Calliophis melanurus</i>	
		133. <i>Calliophis beddomei</i>	E
		134. <i>Calliophis nigrescens</i>	E
		135. <i>Calliophis bibroni</i>	E
		136. <i>Naja naja</i>	
		137. <i>Ophiophagus hannah</i>	
	Viperidae	138. <i>Vipera russelli</i>	
		139. <i>Echis carinatus</i>	
		140. <i>Hypnale hypnale</i>	E
		141. <i>Trimeresurus macrolepis</i>	E
		142. <i>Trimeresurus malabaricus</i>	E
		143. <i>Trimeresurus strigatus</i>	E

E: Endemic to Western Ghats/Southern India

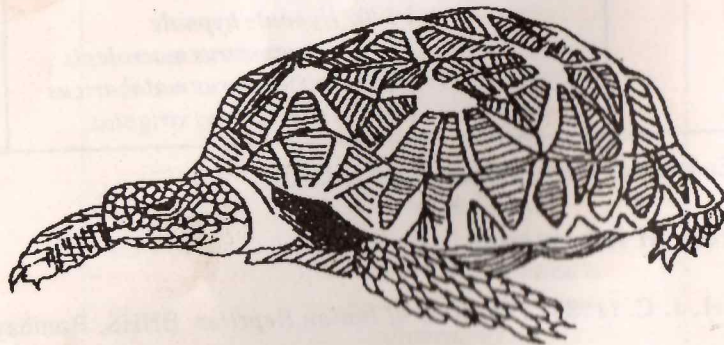
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A CASE OF OESOPHAGEAL OBSTRUCTION IN A ROCK PYTHON (*PYTHON MOLURUS*)

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and

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Introduction

A python, like any other snake, catches its prey, much larger in girth than itself and, after coiling around the prey, mostly kills it by asphyxiation. Once the prey stops showing signs of any movement, the snake uncoils itself and then catching the prey by the head, commences swallowing it.

The mandibles are loosely structured to enable the snake to expand its buccal cavity and swallow the prey. Slowly, by fits and starts, it commences swallowing. The oesophagus is able to expand to facilitate the downward passage of the dead prey. The whole process is gradual and with enough mucoid secretion, the food material slides down the oesophagus.

In forest areas, people have often observed pythons swallowing large animals such as chital, muntjac, etc. However, there are many instances of the snakes dying of asphyxiation due to pressure on the glottis by obstruction of the air passage, or due to intestinal obstruction or due to injuries or ulceration of the intestinal



passage or lack of peristaltic movement. The present case report is about an Indian rock python (*Python molurus*) 11-12 years of age, 260 cm in length (8'6") and weighing 10.5 kg at the Chennai Snake Park.

History

In the Chennai Snake Park, the adult pythons are fed once a fortnight with a large-sized chicken about 1.25 to 1.5 kg weight. The python was reported to be off feed for the past 40 days.

Observation

7th Aug.2000. On examination, found a hard swelling in the oesophageal region about 45 cms from the head. On palpation, it was suggestive of undigested mass of food at the distal portion. Attempts made to dislodge it and push it down the oesophagus did not succeed.

However, to improve the tone, Liv52 liquid (5ml) was administered orally through a tube. The treatment by oral medication and massaging of the swollen portion was continued till 13.8.2000 without progress. The python continued to be off feed. It was dull and not inclined to move even after handling.

Diagnosis

The python was taken to Arignar Anna Zoological Park and, in consultation with the Veterinary Surgeon, a radiogram (X - ray) was taken of the swollen part on 14.8.2000. The X-ray revealed compact food mass in the distal portion of the oesophagus close to the stomach.



Calcium Pantothenate 0.8ml was administered by intramuscular injection to induce peristaltic movement of the gastrointestinal tract. By oral medication, 5ml of Digene and 3mg Liv52 were administered. The treatment was continued for 10 days without any appreciable progress. But, the python was more active. It was decided to do exploratory laparotomy to find out the cause of obstruction and evacuate it out of the passage. On 28.8.2000, the python was taken to the Veterinary Hospital of the Arignar Anna Zoological Park, Chennai, for surgery.

Anaesthesia At 15.00 hrs, 125 mg of Ketamine was administered as anesthesia by intra-muscular injection.

15.25 hrs: 2% Xylocaine by local anaesthesia was infiltrated around the intended site of operation i.e. about 45 cms downwards from the head on the right ventro-lateral aspect exactly above the palpable mass.

15.45 hrs: a 10 cm incision was made on the right ventro-lateral aspect through the skin and muscle. Haemostatic precautions were observed.

On locating the oesophagus, it was cleared of surrounding tissue, which did not show any apparent sign of congestion or necrosis. The oesophagus was raised with help of retention sutures. A 5cm incision was made on the surface to enter into the lumen of the oesophagus.

The mass obstructing the passage was found to be partly digested chicken. Adhesions were found in the oesophageal mucosa in patches. The contents were evacuated carefully without contaminating the surroundings. Adhesions were scraped with blunt end of forceps.



After complete evacuation, the oesophagus was flushed with normal saline and the wound surface mopped with sterile gauze. The incised wound was closed after checking for necrotic patches. (At 15.40 hrs 50mg of Ketamine was administered by intra- muscular injection as additional dose of anaesthesia).

The closing of the wound was done by applying continued sutures of the esophageal region with catgut (0.0 size). The muscular layer was sutured using catgut with continuous sutures.

The surface was dressed with crystalline penicillin powder. 500 mg of Cefotoxin in 3ml of distilled water was instilled through the muscular layer around the incision and the skin layer was closed using cotton thread with interrupted sutures.

The wound was sealed with Tr. Benzoin seal. The surgery was completed by 16.10hrs. The python was brought back to the Snake Park while it was under sedation.

From 29.8.2000 to 31.8.2000, as a follow up treatment the sutured wounds were cleaned with cetrimide tincture and dressed with Healex spray, Ranitidine (one tab/day) and 5ml vitamin B complex were administered by oral medication.

Intra-muscular injection of Cefotoxine 500 mg/day for 3 consecutive days was continued. Using a stomach tube, emulsified egg yolk in 50ml of milk was administered daily (for 4-5 days. Oral medication was continued.

On 1.9.2000, the snake was moving about actively. Continued the same line of treatment the next 2 days.

After 2.9.2000, stopped feeding with egg yolk. The injury was dry and almost healed up. The python was able to move actively.



Oral medication was continued till 9.9.2000 after which the snake was kept under observation without medication.

On 21.9.2000, the python was observed to be moulting. The skin sutures were removed. The injury had completely healed up.

On 3.10.2000, after moulting was completed, the snake was given a medium size chicken which was consumed readily. Since then, the python recovered remarkably and is active and feeding well.

Discussion

A radical exploratory surgery was undertaken to relieve the rock python of the undigested material. The exploratory surgery was timely as necrotic patches started to appear on the oesophageal mucosa. The recovery was uneventful and since its recovery, the snake did not have any difficulty in swallowing or digesting its food.

Acknowledgement

We wish to thank Shri. N.Krishnakumar, Director, Arignar Anna Zoological Park for readily permitting the use of the facilities in the Veterinary Hospital of the Zoo.



NOTES ON REPTILES FROM UJJAIN

Mukhesh Ingle

Snake Conservation Unit

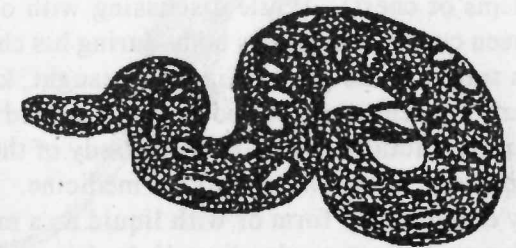
8/1, Khatriwada, Behind Gopal Mandir
Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh – 456 001

There are around 34 species of snakes in Ujjain and its neighbourhood. *Ptyas mucosus*, *Xenochrophis piscator*, *Amphiesma stolata*, *Boiga trigonata*, *Elaphe helena*, *Macropisthodon plumbicolor*, *Eryx conicus*, *Ramphotyphlops braminus*, *Argyrogena fasciolatus*, *Naja oxiana*, *Naja naja*, *Bungarus caeruleus* and *Vipera russelli* used to be common. However, these are now declining in population. The Snake Conservation Unit is conducting 'Snake Awareness Education Programmes' in Ujjain in an effort to save snakes as well as protect humans from snake bites.

Over the years, we have made a number of observations on snakes in Ujjain. I wish to report a few in this article. Early afternoon on September 15, 2000, I received a phone call from a resident of Patni Bazaar area in Ujjain about a snake in a house. When I reached the site, I found a snake within a crack in the wall of a well. Along with the wet soil within the crack, I scooped out an adult and a young worm snake that I later identified as the beaked worm snake (*Typhlops acutus*). This collection, for the first time, adds the species to the already known list of snakes from Ujjain.



On October 21, 2000, my friend Ranjeet and I were on the bank of river Kshipra at 7.30 am when we came across a checkered keelback (*Xenochrophis piscator*) catching a spiny eel (*Mastacembelus armatus*). The event lasted for more than half an hour. At first, the fish was alive and struggling. However, by about 8.15 am the fish died. The snake then dragged its prey from the water to under a nearby bush. Despite the snake's relentless attempt to swallow the fish, at around 9.00 am, the snake too died! We measured the length of the predator and prey. The fish was about 30 cm and the snake, nearly 80 cm.





**ZOOTHERAPEUTIC USE OF GARDEN LIZARD
CALOTES VERSICOLOR (DAUDIN) IN HEALTH CARE
IN MIZORAM, INDIA**

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Garden lizard (*Calotes versicolor*) is the commonest agamid lizard of India (Daniel, 1983). At Kolasib (Mizoram), it is common and seen during day time in unattended land covered with grasses and trees (Harit, 1996).

In Mizoram this lizard is used to cure what is locally known as “awmna”, (bronchitis, laryngitis and all the cough associated problems of chest). While discussing with one of my friends, who had been cured with calotes body during his childhood by his mother, I was told that the garden lizard is caught, killed and the intestine and tail are removed. A rod is then inserted through the body and the lizard is totally dried. Roasted body of the lizard is then ground to a powder form, which acts as medicine. This powder is taken orally either in dry form or with liquid as a medicine. The curative powder made from garden lizard’s body is considered by the tribals of Mizoram as one of the best cures for “awmna”.



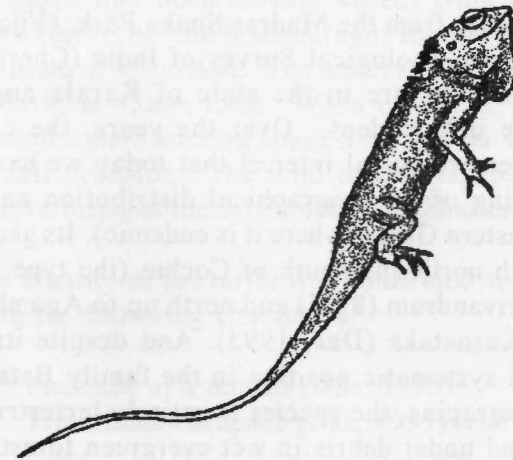
Acknowledgement

The author is thankful to Shri. Lalbiaktluanga, Senior Lecturer, for his valuable suggestions and Ms. Lalrinpuii, for help.

(Note: This cure is based on a local belief only and there is no scientific validation – Editor)

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THE COCHIN FOREST CANE TURTLE (*GEOEMYDA SILVATICA*) IN KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT, TAMILNADU

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The Cochin Forest Cane Turtle (*Geoemyda silvatica*) is amongst the rare and endangered species of Indian chelonians. Since its discovery and description in 1911, the species remained elusive for 70 years till it was rediscovered in 1981 from Chalakudy and Idukki by a researcher from the Madras Snake Park (Vijaya, 1982; Daniel, 1983) and the Zoological Survey of India (Cherian, 1995) respectively. Both sites are in the state of Kerala and the two observations were independent. Over the years, the cane turtle gained a lot of herpetological interest that today we have a much better understanding of its geographical distribution and ecology in the southern Western Ghats (where it is endemic). Its geographical range extends both north and south of Cochin (the type locality) - south till about Trivandrum (8° N) and north up to Agumbe (13° N) in southwestern Karnataka (Das, 1995). And despite its common English name and systematic position in the family Bataguridae - pond turtles and terrapins, the species is entirely terrestrial staying within burrows and under debris in wet evergreen forests (Daniel, 1983; Das, 1985 and 1995).



The occurrence of the forest cane turtle in the Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu has not been explicitly documented in available literature. Known localities of occurrence listed by Das (1995) include Indira Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary (Anamalai Hills) in Tamil Nadu, Neria in Karnataka and Peechi-Vazhani, Neyyar Wildlife Sanctuary, Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary, Nadukani, Idukki Wildlife Sanctuary, Parambikulam, Kothaiyar Reserve Forest, Kavala and 'Agumbe' in Kerala.

Agumbe is in fact in Karnataka. It also seems to us that Kothaiyar listed as a locality in Kerala is indeed 'Kodayar' - a Tamil Nadu Electricity Board dam site, that stretches between Kanyakumari district and Tirunelveli district in southwestern Tamil Nadu. It may then be reasonable to extend the southern limit of the species distribution beyond Neyyar (near Trivandrum) till Kodayar in Kanyakumari district.

On 14.12.00 (at 7.30 am) AEDD collected a week-old cane turtle, which had been freshly killed, from within leaf litter in evergreen forests of the Mahendragiri Range (Kanyakumari district) at an altitude of 450m ASL. The intact shell, deposited at the Chennai Snake Park, is 45mm long. When collected, the head and one of the forelimbs were missing suggesting that the turtle had been killed by a small predator. The mild drizzle during the previous night might have brought the turtle out of its shelter.

The identity of the turtle was confirmed as *Geoemyda silvatica* based on the following characters.

- Presence of a nuchal (Das, 1995)
- Tricarinate carapace (Das, 1995) with a pronounced dorsal ridge
- First vertebral scute narrows toward contact point with the second (Das, 1985)



- Vertebrals wider than long (Das, 1995)
- Coppery brown carapace (soft portions when fresh whitish and densely mottled with black) and yellow plastron with two black spots (Daniel, 1983; Das, 1995).

Our observation not only confirms that the cane turtle occurs in Kanyakumari district but also extends its range further south in Tamil Nadu. The single example collected provides additional information on the breeding of the species. Published literature suggests that the species breeds late in December (Daniel, 1983; Das, 1995). Cane turtles in Kanyakumari district apparently breed in October (considering a minimum of 60 days for the eggs to hatch) or even earlier.

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LENGTH RECORD OF THE BEAKED BLIND SNAKE *TYPHLOPS ACUTUS* (DUMERIL & BIBRON) FROM NORTH KERALA

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and

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A common Beaked Blind snake (*Typhlops acutus*) was caught from a well near Payangadi village of Kannur district in Kerala on 10th June 1996 at around 8.30 hrs at a depth of about 15cm. It was found moving swiftly in the well water often diving deep. The specimen remained active in water for 10 days prior to its collection. The snake's identity was confirmed based on Smith (1943) and measured. Murthy (1986) states that specimens exceeding 55cm in length are recorded. Length of the species according to Smith (1943), Whitaker (1978) and Daniel (1983) is 60cm. The specimen presently collected has the record length of 66cm. The width at the middle of the body measured 1.33cm.

The species can easily be distinguished from all other members of its genus by its large size, being the largest of all the oriental species of *Typhlops* (Smith, 1943), and its strongly projecting pointed and hooked snout. It is found in Peninsular India, south of the Gangetic Plain, but rarer south of latitude 16° N (Smith, 1943; Daniel, 1983).

Acknowledgement

We are grateful to the Director, Zoological Survey of India, Calcutta for facilities and encouragement.



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RANDOM HARVEST

A fine fellah!

“When disturbed, (rattle snakes) retreat; when alarmed, they rattle; when struck, they strike back. To unprejudiced eyes, they are very beautiful; and they have much to teach mankind about proper conduct toward fellow creatures”

(From a letter to the editor in the *New Statesman* 9th May 1986.)

Population explosion

“The python population in Hong Kong is booming as more and more people keep them as pets, then abandon them.

“Almost 1000 pythons were imported to the territory last year, six times as many as in 1998, the *South China Morning Post* has reported.

“But many pythons are quickly abandoned by their owners as they grow up to 10 meters long, almost the length of an average high-rise Hong Kong flat”

(Source: *Hindu Business Line*, 9th January 2001.)



A case of triangular co-evolution

Birds and insects are well-known for their role in the pollination of flowers. Now comes a paper in the *Biological Journal of the Linnean Society* which shows that lizards too help. The Tasmanian snow skink—a lizard confined to mountain tops in that island—tears off the tough, red petals of the honey bush flower that enclose the rest of the flower. They chew the petals for the nectar in them. This savaging of the flower by the skink, in fact, is beneficial for it exposes the reproductive parts of the flower allowing pollinating insects to get at them. Mats Olsson and Richard Shine of the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, discovered this and also that flowers left intact never produced seed.

(Source: *Times of India* 23rd Jan.2001)

Scales win crown for this Miss World

“It’s official—the world’s most beautiful snake is an American. So voted 2,000 of 7,000 judges in the first-ever snake beauty contest, held at the Reptile Zoo at Tula in Russia.

“The winner of the scaly ‘Miss World’ event, a pink-eyed non-poisonous Californian royal albino, best symbolised the Chinese calendar’s 2001 Year of the Snake with its silver colouring, visitors to the zoo decided.

“In second place among contestants originating from 34 nations came a hot favourite from Russia: A deadly, 30-cm Caucasian viper which took 1,000 votes.



“The two-week competition was held to draw attention to improve the snake’s image in 2001, when it symbolises stability, wisdom, strength and luck in business”.

(Source: *Hindu Business Line* 20th Jan.2001)

Newts run over Jaguar plans

“Jaguar’s plans for a multi-million pound factory are being put on hold because of a colony of newts.

“The great crested newts, which have taken over a marshy car park near the Silverstone racing circuit in Northamptonshire, are a protected species. As such, English Nature will decide if they can be moved, so that Jaguar can build a £ 200-million factory for its Formula One team on the site.

“Jaguar may build two ponds for the newts. But English Nature says the newts move large distances and would also need the surrounding area.”

(Source: *Hindu Business Line* 19th Jan.2001)

Trying to live up to their reputation

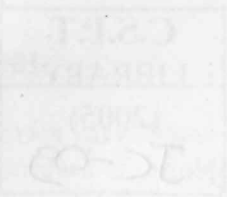
The *Guardian Weekly* of Aug. 3-9, 2000, carries an article by Robin McKie, which first appeared in *The Observer*, titled ‘America in jaws of fear as snakes get more bite’. The article refers to the increasing number of incidents of fatal and near-fatal bites by rattle snakes, which till now, contrary to their fearsome reputation, were known to have caused few deaths - an average of only one in 500 of their human victims had died. But now it is seen that fatal and near-fatal bites have been occurring with greater frequency. The rattler’s bite is not what it used to be.



But why? Theories vary. Some scientists believe that hybrids are evolving at the borders of the separate ranges of different species and that the ability to deliver powerful neurotoxin bites is being passed on from the more deadly species to the less harmful ones. Some scientists believe the causative factor to be that the rattlesnake's traditional prey such as the ground squirrel have evolved enzyme defence systems against rattler venom inducing the rattler to develop more and more deadly venom. Some others point their finger at the action of humans. In rattler round-ups, which in some areas of the U.S. are held every year, thousands of large adult rattlers are killed and there is less of mortality among the smaller young snakes. And it is believed that the young snakes have more venom to make up for their inability to inject as much venom as their elders and that these young snakes have taken over the wild.

- B. Vijayaraghavan

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- ii) To undertake captive breeding of vulnerable species of snakes and other reptiles.
- iii) To promote knowledge on snakes, and other reptiles and amphibians and dispel the erroneous beliefs about them.
- iv) To aid and assist research on reptiles and amphibians.
- v) To provide facilities for the identification and classification of snakes and other reptiles and amphibians and, for this purpose, maintain a museum of study collections.
- vi) To maintain a library of books and other literature on reptiles and amphibians.
- vii) To publish scientific and semi- scientific literature on snakes and other reptiles and amphibians.
- viii) To undertake survey on the distribution and status of snakes and other reptiles and amphibians.
- ix) To provide consultancy services on snakes and other reptiles.
- x) To provide a common forum for interaction among amateur scientists and friends of reptiles and amphibians.