

NEPALESE SNAKES

- Saroj Thapa*

INTRODUCTION

The snakes, which are believed to have evolved from the lizard ancestors, are remarkable animals for the strength of emotion they arouse in people. Due to the geographical and climatic variation, Nepal is believed to be exceptionally rich in terms of the snake. They are found from the tropical zone of the lower Terai (less than 1000m) to the high mountains of the Himalayan zone (more than 4800m). Analysis of the bio-geographical and latitudinal aspect of Nepalese snake, fauna show that the country is a meet point for a numbers of realms. Species of Tibetan, Himalayan, Indo-Chinese, Pan oriental and Indian affinity are found.

The attitudes of people of Nepal towards snake are more surprising to most other people of the world. Most are unable to distinguish between poisonous and non-poisonous snake and assume any snake they encounter as deadly poisonous! As a result irrespective of their nature and ecological values snakes are killed at sight. The field of Herpetology (science of amphibians and reptiles) of Nepal however, has received less priority. Thus, great opportunity waits for further study in this field.

DIVERSITY

There are about 3000 species of snakes recorded on the earth inhabiting both land and sea (Sharma, 1999) of which 375 are poisonous. Out of this vast number of faunal spectrum of snakes only about 77 species and subspecies of five different families (Elapidae, Viperidae, Typhlopidae, Boidae, Colubridae) so far have been recorded in Nepal. Out of this 77 species 56 are non-poisonous and 21 are poisonous. The largest poisonous and non-poisonous snakes of Nepal, which grow more than 5 meter, are king Cobra and Python respectively. The smallest snakes of Nepal are Blind snake which hardly reach 10cm.

ENDANGERED AND ENDEMIC SPECIES

Two species checkered keel back (*Xenochrophis piscator schnurenbergerii*) and Karan's pit viper (*Trimeresurus Karanshahi*) are endemic to the country. The Asiatic rock pythons are protected by government of Nepal, DNPWC Act 1973. The Red Data Book of Nepal (1995) has recommended 5 species of snakes for the legal protection that includes *Eryx conicus*, *Elachistodon westermanni*, *Xenochrophis Flavipunctatus schnurenbergerii* and *Ophiohagus hannah* which are also included in the different threat categories of IUCN and CITES.

CONSERVATION

Snakes represents a significant natural resource in this agricultural nation as a rodents, which must compete with man and also carry potentially lethal disease, comprises the bulk of the diet of many Nepalese snakes. Besides, they also serve as an important agent in the natural food chain, especially many large bird and mammals feed on them. The overall danger from snake is extremely low compared to the other hazards of modern day. All Nepalese snakes must be protected due to their rareness, economic importance, religious sentiments, and ecological, biological, traditional, educational, scientific and even inspirational values. Even then snakes are directly or indirectly threatened due to habitat loss, overexploitation, superstitions, commercial trade and ignorance. Thus, a great long term conservation strategy is urgently felt in order to check the negative impacts. Formal as well as non-formal education through out the country is necessary so that people can realize and appreciate snakes as natural resources.

REFERENCES

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* Katmandu Forestry College