Preliminary Survey of Snake Diversity from Malegaon Tehsil of Washim District

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Abstract: In the present study, the authors have shared their experience of being snake friend during 2008-2013. In all 21 snakes species were rescued from Malegaon tehsil area of Washim district. Rescue work was done after receiving call from person who has seen the snake in his vicinity. 15 non-venomous, 5 venomous including big four and slender coral snake and 1 semi-venomous snake were found. As the result shows percentage of non-venomous snake is large. Siting of Slender Coral Snake was done only once in these five years. Majority of venomous snakes which were rescued was spectacled cobra, coral snake and Russell’s viper.

Key words: Malegaon Tehsil of Washim District • Wild Life Protection Act • Snake rescue

INTRODUCTION

Geographically Washim district is located in between longitude 16.61-21.16 N and latitudes 76.7-77.4 E. The district consist of Washim, Risod, Malegaon, Manora, Magrulpir & Karanja (lad) tehsils [1]. The forest cover of Washim district is 6.40% [2]. The present study was conducted in Malegaon tehsil of Washim district. The present paper consists of study of snake diversity of Malegaon on the basis of snake rescues done by the authors during the previous five years of 2008-2013. This is plain agricultural land of Deccan plateau. Hot and dry climate of our area provides an ideal environment for cobras, kraits and vipers which are the majority of venomous snakes found in this study. Most houses in these rural areas are made of mud and have many crevices where rodents flourish. Snakes have easy access to the interiors of such houses and often enter them in search of food. Peoples whenever found such snake in their houses, called one of the authors to catch them. It is also found on many occasions when farmers which have some knowledge of snake identification called us for the snake rescue even from their farms. The peoples of this region have shown more interest in saving them by calling snake friend than to kill them. The calls were not attended from the town only but the villages and farms around were also covered. In fact the Indian rock python (Python molurus molurus) rescue was done from one of the nearby village “Jaulka” which is 10 km away from town. Firewood and dried cow dung stored in or near the houses also provide easy shelter for snakes and rodents as many of the calls were attended from such houses.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The description by the caller, time and area of call itself gave idea of the presence of probable type of snake species. The snakes were caught by the aluminum hooked sticks. Upon catchment the snakes were immediately put in to plastic bottles with holes to circulate the air. The snakes were bought to resident of one of the author where the graduated scale is fixed on the wall and the length of snake was measured by holding the snake at the tip of the tail, parallel to graduated scale. As this procedure has to be carried out in short time the length of venomous snakes are less accurate. The caught snakes were released in forest area which comes under Deputy Conservator Akola Division and known as Patur forest area.

In one of the case when the Indian rock python (Python molurus molurus) which is included in Scheduled I of Wild Life (Protection) Act 1972 was rescued from nearby village proper panchanama was done and then it was released in presence of police officer. The snakes were released in such areas in order to minimize their conflict with human beings. The caught snakes were...
It is not so common but found almost all over India. Its body has various patterns of reddish, pink, brown, etc. with a brown stripe on posterior body. Head color is brown. It can grow up to 6.5 ft the maximum length of our specimen was 4 ft.

- **Rat Snake** (*Ptyas mucosa*)
  (*Non-Venomous*)

Rat Snake is totally harmless non-venomous snake. It can have many colors from brown to black. Its upper body always has many bands like patterns and it is the distinguishing character for identifying Cobra and Rat snake. This is the one of the largest snakes of India and can grow up to 11 ft. 8 ft was maximum length of our specimen.

- **Common Wolf Snake** (*Lycodon aulicus*)
  (*Non-Venomous*)

This is one of the most common nocturnal species which is widely distributed in India. It has body color brown with yellow or light yellow broad bands. It can grow up to 2.5 ft, maximum length of our specimen was about 2 ft.

- **Chekered Keelback or Water Snake** (*Xenochrophis piscator*)
  (*Non-Venomous*)

This is the most common non-venomous snake found around humans. It has greenish or yellow Color with black color patches on the whole body. It can grow up to 5.5 ft maximum length of our specimen was about 4 ft. The catches were mostly around water bodies, sewage lines, mud and any wet areas. It’s a very aggressive snake and bites on disturbance almost every time.

- **Green Keelback** (*Macropisthodon plumbicolor*)
  (*Non-Venomous*)

This is common non-venomous snake found in green grass. It has stout and viper like in structure of body with green color. The average length of this snake in 2 ft and our specimen was of same size.

- **Common Krait** (*Bungarus caeruleus*)
  (*Venomous*)
This is one of the most deadly venomous snakes of India, having neurotoxin venom which causes paralysis to its victim. Venom of this species is assumed to be 16 times more powerful than Cobra. It has black body color with white bands which is its distinguishing feature. It is active only at night i.e. it’s exclusively a nocturnal species. It can grow up to 5.5 ft maximum length of our specimen was about 3.5 ft.

- Spectacled Cobra (*Naja naja*)
  *(Venomous)*

This is the most common venomous snake of India because it likes to live around humans in search of rodents and hiding place. It can live in rat holes, termite mounds and almost all kinds of dark places. Its color may variable from light brown, dark brown, gray or jet black. It has a distinctive hood. A beautiful “Spectacle” like mark present on the hood. It can grow up to 6.5 ft maximum length of our specimen was about 6.5 ft. We have also attended call where peoples found many baby cobras but on closer observation they found eggs of cobra also. After receiving the call we were able to save 7 baby cobras and their mother also.

- Russell’s Viper (*Daboia russelii*)
  *(Venomous)*

It is one of highly venomous snakes found in India. It has brown body color with oval shaped spots on the whole body & can grow up to 5.5 ft maximum length of our specimen was about 4.5 ft due to larger fangs size quantity of venom spited is high. It is the most aggressive venomous snake that we have encountered with.

- Bronze-Back Tree Snake (*Dendrelaphis tristis*)
  *(Non-Venomous)*

One of the most common arboreal snakes found in this study. It has a very thin body with long prehensile tail. Bronze or brown color stripe runs along the whole body that’s why the name is Bronze Back. It can grow up to 4 ft maximum length of our specimen was about 4 ft.

- Green Vine Snake (*Ahaetulla nasuta*)
  *(Semi-Venomous)*

It has body very thin with arrow like head and whole body green in color. It is diurnal and exclusively Arboreal species an rarely come on ground. It can grow up to 6.5 ft maximum length of our specimen was about 3 ft.

- Saw Scaled Viper (*Echis carinatus*)
  *(Venomous)*

This is second most common viper of India. It is also deadly venomous like other vipers. It has brown body color brown or gray with white color patterns and spots along its length. It can grow up to 3 ft 5 ft maximum length of our specimen was about 1 ft.

- Banded Racer/ Dhulnagin (*Argyrogena fasciolata*)
  *(Non Venomous)*

It is most commonly found non venomous snake in our area. Our most of the citing were during February to April which is also their breeding season.

- Domeril’s Black Headed Snake (*Sibynophis subpunctatus*)
  *(Non Venomous)*

It is a species of nonvenomous snake endemic to India and Sri Lanka. It is brown color snake and can be easily miss-understood with slender coral snake, only
difference being it don’t have black dot near the tail. It is active by day as well as at night. It lives in leaf litter, preying on geckos, skinks and smaller snakes.

- Brahminy Worm Snake *(Ramphotyphlops braminus)*
  *(Non-Venomous)*

  It has always shiny brown or black body color. It is very small snake and can grow up to 1ft maximum length of our specimen was about 11 inches.

- Red Sand Boa/Mandol *(Eryx johnii)*
  *(Non Venomous)*

  It has the head is wedge-shaped with narrow nostrils and very small eyes. The body is cylindrical in shape with small polished scales. The tail, which is blunt, rounded and not distinct from the body, appears truncated. These snakes are rather timid and shy. Its tail resembles with its head and it have habit of moving back from tail on touch, so it is also called as don-tondya in Marathi and do-muhain hindi. This is the largest member of the Boidae family found in India.

- Common Cat Snake/Manjary *(Boiga trigonata)*
  *(Non Venomous)*

  It has a yellowish-olive or pale grey color along the back and a white black-edged zigzag band along the length of the head with two brown bands edged with black, diverging posteriorly. The belly is white and can have a series of small brown spots along each side.

- Slender Coral Snake *(Calliophis melanurus)*
  *(Venomous)*

  The Slender Coral Snake is light brown and family speckled. The head and neck are black with two conspicuous yellow spots on the top of the head. There is a ragged black ring at the tail-base and at the tail-up. The underside is uniform pinkish-red (coral), bright scarlet at vent and the underside of the tail is bluish. The head is blunt and has the same width as the neck. We have only one rescue call of slender coral snake in five years.

- Montane Trinket *(Coelognathus helena)*
  *(Non Venomous)*

  It is slender-bodied. The color may vary from olive to tan to chocolate-brown, with a distinctly banded forebody. The bands consist of several rows of large, yellow, oval or round spots encircled with black.

- Banded Kukri *(Oligodon arnensis)*
  *(Non Venomous)*

  It is a species of nonvenomous snakes. Average length is 1.5 ft and our specimen was of highest length of 1ft and 5 inches.

**DISCUSSION**

As the result shows that the majority of snake’s species which were rescued was of non-venomous type. Along with big four venomous snakes slender coral snake sighting was crucial though this snake was sighted only once in last five years. Due to presence of snake friend in this area peoples have shown more tendencies to rescue the snakes rather than to kill them. Most of the bites which authors came across were while killing the snake. Spectacled cobra, Russell’s viper and coral snakes were most rescued venomous snakes. Snakes are highly misunderstood reptiles on earth which are thought to kill humans but in fact they are friend of farmers as they help in keeping check over rodents.

**REFERENCES**