

A check-list of the amphibians and reptiles of Andaman and Nicobar Islands

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ASSTRACT

A checklist of the amphibians and reptiles known from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands is presented. At present, 17 species of amphibians and 77 species of reptiles are known, endemicity in these groups being 25.5% and 29.9%, respectively.

The Andamans consist of 291 islands, the Nicobars of 28, both the groups being located in the Bay of Bengal. Floristically, the group of islands collectively referred to as the Andamans are similar to the Tenasserim coast of Myanmar. Ripley and Beehler (1989) hypothesized that these islands may have been once contiguous with the mainland during the Late Pleistocene when sea levels dropped. On the other hand, the Nicobars appear to be a group of truly oceanic islands, its biota presumably being established through over-water dispersal. Nicobar's avifauna has been shown to be an impoverished subset of that of the Andamans by Ripley and Beehler (1989) who contended that drops in sea levels during the Pleistocene failed to join the two island groups because of the deep saltwater strait (the 10° Channel) between the two island groups. The primary colonization source for the herpetofauna of these islands is thought to be Myanmar for the Andamans and Thailand for the Nicobars (Biswas and Sanyal, 1980). However, analysis of faunal composition and affinities of the region is bedeviled by inadequate data, for which fresh field work has been

initiated. The primary sources of information on the herpetofauna are Sarkar (1990) for amphibians and Biswas and Sanyal (1977, 1980) for reptiles.

The Andamans have 11 reptile species endemic to the Bay Islands, while the Nicobars has 13, the two island groups sharing six endemic species. In all, 22 species that occur in the Andamans have not been found on the Nicobars, while the Nicobars also have 21 species that have thus far not been reported from the Andamans. The deep 10° Channel that runs between the two island groups is a barrier between the ranges of endemic avian species of both the Andamans and the Nicobars (Ripley and Beehler, 1989).

A checklist of species and subspecies of amphibians and reptiles recorded from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands has been presented here, largely based on literature records and museum material. At present, 17 species of amphibians and 77 species of reptiles have been recorded. The total endemicity at the species level is 4 (25.5%) for amphibians and 23 (29.9%) for reptiles.