

An Overview of the Threatened Herpetofauna of South Asia



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THREATENED HERPETOFAUNA OF INDIA

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INDIA - GENERAL PHYSIOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

India is a country of exceptional species diversity. With a land area, and exclusive coastal area of 3,387,539 sq km and a variety of ecological conditions, the Republic of India extends from the Himalayas to the foot of the southern Asian peninsula. The physiographic zones represented within the political boundaries of India, as classified by Das (1996) are:

Bay Islands.- The Andaman and Nicobar archipelago is situated between 5° 40' N and 92° 10' E, in the Bay of Bengal. These islands form a chain of submarine mountains that sprawl in a crescent between Cape Negrais in Myanmar to Achin Head in Sumatra, Indonesia. The total land area of these islands is an estimated 8,293 sq km. Average annual rainfall exceeds 3,000 mm, the great variety of environments, including bays, coral reefs, mangrove and rainforests on hill ranges that reach 700 m, support a species-rich herpetofauna. The herpetofauna of the Andamans is an impoverished one derived from Myanmar during the time of its connection with the Asian mainland during the low waters of the Pleistocene glaciation, while that of the Nicobars, an oceanic group, is allied to that of Sumatra, presumably having been established by waif (overwater) dispersal.

Deccan.- Deccan is the flat peninsular India excluding the hill ranges to the east and west, and south of the areas watered by the Himalayan rivers. Until the Miocene-Pliocene (and perhaps even the Late Pleistocene), evergreen forests were widespread in peninsular India, as indicated by palaeontological evidence. The conversion of the wet forests to deciduous forests is possibly an effect of the decline in rainfall, a result of the slight southern shift of the equator, the uplift of the Himalayas, the rise of the Western Ghats and human activities over the past 10,000 years.

Eastern Ghats.- The Eastern Ghats represent a weathered relict of the peninsular plateau, marked by a series of low isolated hills that run from the Khondmal in the Baudh-Khandmal (Phulbani) District, Orissa State, southwards to central Tamil Nadu State, where they veer off towards the south-west to meet the Western Ghats in the Nilgiris. The northern and southern sections of the Eastern Ghats are separated by the Godavari delta, which is approximately 130 km in width, and other