

## 26. NEW EVIDENCE OF THE OCCURRENCE OF WATER MONITOR (*VARANUS SALVATOR*) IN MEGHALAYA

The distribution of the Water Monitor (*Varanus salvator*) in the western parts of its range is enigmatic. This otherwise adaptable species is to be found mainly in the coastal areas of Orissa, in the deltas of Brahmini-Baitarini, the Sunderbans of West Bengal and Bangladesh; Sri Lanka, and on many of the islands in the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago (reviewed by Whitaker and Whitaker 1980, distribution maps in Das 1980). The lizard is absent along the rest of the eastern coast of India and the distribution, in general, in the region appears similar to that of the Saltwater Crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*). The reason for the absence of both species in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu appears to be a result of hunting, and the destruction of their mangrove habitats. Fairly large populations

of *V. salvator* do, however, still occur in several pockets south of Calcutta city which were once dominated by mangroves, and Finn (1929) wrote that a large specimen used to frequent Calcutta's Zoological Gardens (at Alipore) in the 1890's.

*Varanus salvator*, however, has also been reported from regions in India far from the coast. Anderson (1872) reported that the species was not uncommon in Assam. Smith (1935) included the eastern Himalayas in the distribution of the species, but listed no specific localities. Auffenburg (1986) stated that the species occurred in Assam.

The Zoological Survey of India has a specimen (ZSI 2155) from Samagooting in the Naga hills, Nagaland. The