

BOOK REVIEWS

Banglar Bonnyoprani, Vol. I. (In Bangla), by Mohammed Ali Reza Khan. 1987. Bangla Academy, Dhaka. 1-16, 1-169. 44 pl., 1 map. Price taka 125 (US \$4).

Bangla or Bengali is spoken by an estimated 200 million people in Bangladesh and eastern India. Khan's volume is the first in a series of three that attempts to describe, in Bangla, the vertebrates (excluding fish) of the Republic of Bangladesh. The series is an expanded version of Khan's (1982) checklist: Volume I deals with the wildlife habitats and the herpetofauna, and volumes II and III (recently published) deal with the birds and mammals, respectively.

Dr. Mohammed Ali Reza Khan was until recently Associate Professor of Zoology at Dhaka University and is presently Curator of the Al Ain Zoo and Aquarium at Abu Dhabi, U.A.E. A member of the IUCN/SSC Commission on Education and of several of IUCN's Survival Specialist Groups, Khan is recognised as an authority on the wildlife of Bangladesh and is a prolific author.

The volume is divided into three chapters following an introduction: a definition of wildlife and a description of the various forest types of Bangladesh, a rather short account of the amphibians, and a longer one of the reptiles. The herpetofauna of this little country includes some 143 species (Khan 1982) and shows an admixture of both Indian- and Indo-Malayan elements. Geographic data of the country, considered to be the most densely populated by humans, are naturally of interest to wildlife biologists. According to Khan, Bangladesh has a total area of ca. 143,998 km², of which 8,300 km² consists of streams, rivers and estuaries and a mere 21,950 km² of various categories of forests. The last figure, Khan admits, is a government statistic, and the actual forested area is much less.

The chapter on amphibians is only 12 pages, a reflection of how little is known about this group. Earlier, Khan (1982) listed 19 species of amphibians that may occur in Bangladesh, but field work in some of the more inaccessible, frog-rich regions, such as the Chittagong Hill Tracts and Sylhet, should increase this tally. Most of the frog and toad species dealt with are widespread throughout the Indian subcontinent. Mention is made of the tree toad (*Nectophryne kempfi*), which the author suspects is found in Sylhet district. The chapter closes with an account of the country's trade in frogs.

The last and longest (99 printed pages excluding illustrations) chapter concentrates on the reptiles. It commences, after a brief account on reptiles in general, with chelonians, a group well represented in Bangladesh (25 out of the 33 species found on the subcontinent). This is also a resource heavily exploited; between July 1989 and June 1982, the equivalent of Taka 30-40 million was earned by the country through turtle export. This legal trade, Khan writes, is a tiny proportion of the country's turtle trade, as very large numbers of these animals are smuggled across the border to India.

Of the 850 or so species of amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals thought to occur

in Bangladesh, only two, according to the author, can be considered endemic. These are the black softshell turtle (*Trionyx nigricans*) which is known to be restricted to a tank attached to the shrine reportedly of Byzid Bostami at Chittagong and in nearby ponds, and the Indian eyed turtle (*Morenia petersi*), widespread in Bangladesh. Khan did suspect the occurrence of the latter within Indian limits, and the species has been found in recent years in the Indian state of Bihar (Das 1985; Moll and Vijaya 1986).

Each species account of chelonians consists of a brief description, with natural history and status notes, often of considerable interest. Khan deserves to be commended for the first records of numerous turtle and tortoise species from his country, including *Batagur baska*, *Kachuga tentoria*, *K. dhongoka*, *Melanochelys tricarinata*, *Cuora ambonensis*, *Indotestudo elongata* and *Manouria emys*. The section following the species accounts deals with various issues, including the turtle trade, the resultant decline in wild populations and ways to stem this.

Compared to the chelonians, the lizard fauna seems impoverished, with only some 17 species recorded (Khan 1982) and the present volume describes only the commoner or more interesting forms. One of these, the flying lizard, is reported from the country by the author, from the Chittagong forests, based on a sight record: Khan assumes this to be *Draco maculatus*. The locality of the present specimen, however, more closely approaches the distribution of *Draco blanfordii norvillii*, known from the nearby Indian state of Assam as well as northern Burma (see Musters 1983).

There are other interesting snippets of information on the lizard species. According to this book, the tokay gecko (*Gekko gekko*), the largest of the geckos, is used in folk medicine in Bangladesh as a substitute for the once available spiny-tailed lizard (*Uromastyx hardwickii*), which is found in Pakistan and north-western India. Khan restricts the water monitor (*Varanus salvator*) to the salt-water regions in the country. This species is widespread, though often very rare at present, in non-coastal regions in southeast Asia and in north-eastern India, and thus may be found (or was in the past) in Sylhet, Mymensingh and the three Chittagong Hill Tracts districts of Bangladesh. There is an example of this species in the Indian National Zoological Collection, maintained by the Zoological Survey of India (Reg. No. 2126) with data indicating that it was collected from Rangpore in northern Bangladesh.

Seventy-nine snake species are known to occur in Bangladesh (Khan 1988). The present volume describes, once again, the commoner or the more interesting forms, among which are the two python species, the rock python (*Python molurus*), now largely restricted to the Sunderbans, and the reticulated python (*P. reticulatus*), distributed over Sylhet and the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Of the Indian egg-eating snake (*Elachistodon westermanni*), the author has no information, apart from an old specimen, now at the British Museum, collected from Rangpore. Following the brief descriptions of snakes are (often too lengthy) accounts of the various superstitions associated with these reptiles.

All three crocodylian species of the subcontinent occur in this small country. The gharial