

An Overview of the Threatened Herpetofauna of South Asia



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STATUS OF HERPETOFAUNA OF BHUTAN

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BHUTAN-GENERAL PHYSIOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan (named from the Sanskrit, meaning 'high ground') is located between 88° 45' and 92° 10' E; 26° 40' and 28° 15' N along the southern slopes of eastern Himalayas. Its 46,600 sq km land-locked territory is largely mountainous, although the southern parts include the northern plains of the Brahmaputra River. Altitudinally, habitats range from 200 m to over 7,500 m and the climate ranges from hot and humid in the South, to cold in alpine, high-rising mountains with deep valleys and ravines and depressions in the North (Rao, 1989; Thingley, 1989). Bhutan shows great ecological diversity unexpected for such a small country. Forest cover comprises 72.5 per cent of the land area (of which 8.1% is scrub forest), and forestry plays a major role in the economy (16 per cent of the GDP in 1980-81).

The ecological regions within Bhutan, as categorised by Karan (1990) include the Great Himalayas, Inner Himalayas, Outermost Ranges, and Duars. The snow-capped peaks of Bhutan that rise to a series of granitic mountains, the 7,320 m tall Chomo Lhari peak and the even taller (at 7,554 m) Kula Kangri peak of northern Bhutan, along with the associated valleys at elevations between 3,700-5,400 m are part of the Great Himalayas.

The Inner Himalayas are made of the spurs from the Great Himalayas that radiate southward to form ranges. Depending on elevation and degree of exposure, the vegetation ranges from subtropical forests of the moist monsoon valleys to alpine vegetation of the higher slopes. Some of central Bhutan's fertile valleys are located in the Inner Himalayas between 1,500-2,700 m. The outer ranges of Bhutan rise from the Duars to about 600 m, moving in steep escarpments up to over 1,500 m. The principal rivers, such as the Torsa, Raidak, Sankosh and Manas have cut deeply through these ranges and have weathered them, and the landscape is marked with steep escarpment and dipslopes, separated by longitudinal strike valleys and intersected by meandering ravines. The low-lying Duars, an extension of the Ganga-Brahmaputra plains, essentially within Indian limits, enter for an extent of