

Conservation Biology of
AMPHIBIANS
OF ASIA

*Status of Conservation and Decline of Amphibians:
Eastern Hemisphere*

Edited by

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CHAPTER 10

Amphibians of the Maldives Archipelago

Indraneil Das

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Abbreviations in text and references: asl = above sea level; CITES = Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora; GAA = Global Amphibian Assessments; IUCN = International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources/The World Conservation Union.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Maldivian archipelago lies between latitudes 8°N and 1°S and longitudes 72–74°E, and extends for 756 km southwest of peninsular India (Fig. 1). The archipelago is composed of interrupted double chains of 26 coral atolls, resting on a submerged mountain range, and has a land area of 298 km². The human population is dense; in 2012, these islands recorded 394,451 inhabitants (Anonymous 2012). Of the 1192 islands, of which 202 are inhabited, all are small (average size 0.7 km², the largest 13 km²) and low-lying, with average elevations of not more than 1.5–2 m asl, although a few have swamps and several have small lagoons in the interior. The Maldivian Archipelago lies between two other archipelagos in a north-south line; to the north linked by Minicoy (belonging to India) is the Lakshadweep (formerly Laccadive) archipelago, while to the south is the Chagos archipelago. An inventory of the islands of the Maldives, annotated with data on human population size, land use, important physical features, and former names was prepared by Maniku (1983).

Although subtropical, these islands are influenced by the two monsoons, the southwest between April and August and the northeast between October and February. Rainfall is evenly distributed throughout the year (except between January and March), the average amount being approximately 1,950 mm per annum. There is little seasonal variation in temperature, (range 24–30°C). The islands' surface consists of coral sand with virtually no topsoil, resulting in the growth of only coconuts and scrub vegetation. A few islands have large evergreen trees that form small jungle-like growth. Small patches of pioneering mangrove species colonize the seaward side of these marshes on the inner edge of the lagoonal beach; the most important mangrove species are *Avicennia marina*, *Bruguiera cylindrica*, *Rhizophora mucronata*, *Sonneratia caseolaris*, and *S. acida*. Further details of the biota of the Maldives are provided by Phillipps (1958a).