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Sightings of the Common Monitor Lizard, *Varanus bengalensis* in Sirohi District, Rajasthan, India

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Abstract: Opportunistic observations on *Varanus bengalensis* (Daudin, 1802) are from six different localities viz., Rishikesh temple, Kue Sagna village, Markundeshwar temple, Government College from Abu Road Tehsil, Selwara Dam in Reodar Tehsil and West Banas Dam in Pindwara Tehsil of Sirohi district in Southern Rajasthan, India. The species is listed in the Schedule-I of the Indian WPA (1972), 'Near Threatened' (NT) according to IUCN and listed under CITES Appendix-I. This is the first report of the species from the region and future studies on the bio-ecology needs to be undertaken.

Keywords: *Varanus bengalensis*, Sirohi, WPA, IUCN, CITES

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Introduction

India is home to four varanid species viz., Desert monitor lizard *Varanus griseus* Mertens 1954, Barred/oval/yellow monitor lizard *V. flavescens* (Hardwicke & Gray, 1827), Large Bengal/Common Monitor Lizard *V. bengalensis* (Daudin, 1802) and Water monitor *V. salvator* Laurenti, 1768. Capturing or poaching all the four is illegal as they are listed in the Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife protection Act, 1972. Both *V. griseus* and *V. bengalensis* occur in the state of Rajasthan; however, the former is confined to the western

part while the latter is widely spread throughout the state (<http://www.rajasthanwildlife.in/history/history1.htm>). The Bengal monitor lizard is reported from Jodhpur, Bikaner, Nagaur, Ajmer and Jaisalmer districts of Rajasthan (Biswas and Sanyal, 1977). This species is listed in the Schedule-I of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and CITES listed this species under Appendix-I. Recently, its IUCN conservation status is assessed as 'Near Threatened' (NT) (Cota *et al.*, 2021). *V. benghalensis* is carnivorous and known



Fig. 1: The monitor and the wagtail (encircled red) spotted in the location.



Fig. 2: Sighting at Markundeshwar temple- Abu Road.



Fig. 3: Sighting at West Banas Dam- Pindwara Tehsil.



Fig. 4: Indian flap-shell turtle inhabiting the Rishikesh pond.

to scavenge carcasses, they prey on annelids, insects, amphibians, smaller reptiles, birds, small mammals, eggs and are also capable of ripping and tearing flesh from larger animals and carcasses (Auffenberg, 1994).

The present opportunistic observations on *Varanus bengalensis* (Daudin, 1802) is from six different localities viz., Rishikesh temple (24°31'40.1"N 72°46'26.3"E) (Fig. 1), Kue Sagna village (24°27'56.9"N 72°48'09.5"E), Markundeshwar temple (24°28'33.5"N 72°52'27.3"E) (Fig. 2), Government College (24°28'42.5"N 72°46'40.9"E) from Abu Road Tehsil, Selwara Dam in Reodar Tehsil (24°38'54.4"N 72°36'30.7"E) and West Banas Dam in Pindwara Tehsil (24°42'11.4"N 72°55'11.3"E) (Fig. 3) of Sirohi district in Southern Rajasthan, India. Photographs were taken using Nikon camera-D5600 with AF-P NIKKOR 70-300MM

Lens during March 2021 to October 2022. Most of the sightings were around Abu Road Tehsil that leads to the pilgrimage centre of Arbudadevi atop Mount Abu, part of the Aravalli hill range traversing Delhi-Rajasthan-Gujarat states of North-western India. The area is surrounded by dry deciduous forest patches at the foothills of Aravalli hills in Rajasthan. The Rishikesh Temple is located in a dry deciduous forest patch inhabited by peafowls and langurs in the foothills. On 28.3.2021 during 15.00-16.45 h, a full grown solitary varanid adult was in visual cum chemical surveillance of the stone pedestals of the temple pond constantly flicking its bifid tongue and a Grey Wagtail- *Motacilla cinerea* Tunstall, 1771 (Fig.1) was observed hopping close to the Monitor lizard. A breeding population of the Indian soft-shelled turtle *Lissemys punctata* (listed in Sch. I of WPA) (Fig.4) were observed, around 10 individuals were

spotted in the temple pond. Turtles are revered in the Hindu culture, rendered care and protection by the devotees and priests of the temple. The ecological role of monitor lizards in agriculture, forest ecosystems etc., includes predation, scavenging but are threatened by hunting and illegal trade (Shreya and Koch, 2018). This is the first report of the species from the region and future studies on the bio-ecology needs to be undertaken.

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