Short Communication

OCCURRENCE OF THE SEA SNAKE, ENHYDRINA SCHISTOSA IN THE CHILKA LAKE, ORISSA

No research is reported on the snakes of the Chilka Lake since the time of Annandale (1915) who has first focussed our attention on the faunal wealth of the unique lake. Recently I had the opportunity to survey the lake at Rambha Bay and Barakul with herpetology as the primary objective. In the course of field investigations over twenty days spent mostly cruising the shallow and deeper portions of the lake by motor and country boats, I had on several occasions noticed the abundance of three species of snakes i.e. 1. Ochrosydrus granulatus (Acrochordidae). 2. Cerberus rhynchops (Colubridae), and 3. Hydrophis obscursus (Hydrophiidae). Annandale (op. cit) recorded all these three species but failed to report the presence of the Common Sea Snake, Enhydrina schistosa. I was, therefore, pleasantly surprised to find a specimen of this species caught in the fishermen’s nets near Barakul. Thus, this specimen is not only an additional record to the snake fauna of the Chilka but also is the first record of the species from the lake.

The only specimen picked up is a juvenile, measuring 790 mm in total length. It is grey above with distinot black crossbands broadest in the middle and tepering to a point on the sides and whitish below. The head is greenish, devoid of markings and the chin and throat are white. When it was captured and placed out of water, it became very active and its disposition was not inoffensive. Although another sea snake, Hydrophis obscursus is common in the lake with which the fishermen are quite familiar, they are able to identify the Common Sea Snake as more deadly and hence they prefer to call it ‘Dusta sarp’ which in Oriya means a bad snake.

Although this species is common in the tidal waters of the Bay of Bengal, Smith (1943) has made on mention of its probable occurrence in the estuaries. Mutthy (1977) has, however, collected this snake in good number from the shallow and muddy estuaries of Ennore, Adyar, and Kovelong, near Madras.

It can be concluded from the above account that the recent collectors have failed to record this species from the Chilka Lake because no attention was paid to the herpetology and it is probable that further investigations may yield interesting results to ascertain the distribution of the Common Sea Snake in the Chilka Lake.
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References


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