

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. *Chersydrus granulatus* (Acrochordidae). 2. *Cerberus rhynchops* (Colubridae), and 3. *Hydrophis obscurus* (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 distinct black crossbands broadest in the middle and tapering 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 obscurus* 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 no 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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am thankful to the Director, Zoological Survey of India, for assigning the herpetological studies of the Chilka Lak to me in the on-going research project with the colloboration of the Estuarine Biological Station, Berhampore.

REFERENCES

- ANNANDALE, N. 1915. Fauna of the Chilka Lake. Reptiles and Batrachia. *Mem. India, Mus. Calcutta*, **15** : 167-174.
- MURTHY, T. S. N. 1977. On sea snakes occuring in Madras Waters. *J. mar. biol. Ass. India*, **19** (1) : 68-72.
- SMITH, M. A. 1943. *Fauna of British India, Ceylon, and Burma including the whole of Indo-Chinese subregion. Reptilia and Amphiba. 3, Serpentes*. London : Taylor and Francis (Reprinted 1961 and 1981).

T.S.N. MURTHY

*Southern Regional Station,
Zoological Survey of India,
Madras 600 028.*