

(V)

DISTRIBUTION OF *BOIGA FORSTENI* (DUMÉRIL, BIBRON ET DUMÉRIL, 1854) IN NORTHERN INDIA

The colubrid snakes of the genus *Boiga* Fitzinger, 1826 is represented by 32 species in Asia and 16 species in India (Orlov and Ryabov, 2002; Tillack *et al.*, 2004; Manamendra-Arachchi and Pethiyagoda, 2007; Whitaker and Captain, 2004; Vogel and Ganesh, 2013). Forsten's cat snake *Boiga forsteni* (Duméril, Bibron et Duméril, 1854) has a wide distribution in India and it is reported from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and entire Western Ghats from Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. In the west, it is reported from Gujarat and Rajasthan (Smith, 1943; Tillack *et al.*, 2004; Srinivasulu and Das, 2008; Sharma *et al.*, 2002; Vyas, 2004). The western most known locality for the species is Mt. Abu in southern Rajasthan (Daniel, 1963; Sharma *et al.*, 2002). The eastern distribution limit is recorded as Birbhum and Sijna in West Bengal (Stoliczka, 1871; Whitaker and Captain, 2004) and Sikkim (Anderson, 1871; Stoliczka, 1871; Theobald, 1876). However, Tillack *et al.* (2008) after analyzing Stoliczka's (1871) description showed that the record from Sikkim does not represent *B. forsteni* but is referable to *Boiga siamensis* Nootpand, 1971 (Pauwels *et al.*, 2005). Similarly, they also remarked that listing of *Boiga forsteni* from the eastern Himalaya e.g. Darjeeling may be misidentified and turn out to be specimen of *B. siamensis*.

In the North, *Boiga forsteni* is known from Nepal where it is reported from Danagadhi, Sukla Phanta (close to Dudhwa Tiger reserve in India) and Dharan all in terai landscape within an elevation of 200-349 m (Schleich and

Kästle, 2002). In India, northernmost limit of the species is from the Uttarakhand state and it is reported from three districts viz. Dehradun, Pauri and Nainital within an elevation of 900 m (Husain and Ray, 1995). However, the only specific locality record from Uttarakhand comes from a specimen (ZSIK 16395; male) collected from Kaladhungi (elevation-393 m) of Nainital district.

A second specific locality record of *Boiga forsteni* from Uttarakhand state is provided. One adult (unsexed) specimen was encountered on July 7, 2013 in the Mundal forest camp (29.952781° N, 78.263152° E; 300 msl), Chilla Range of Rajaji tiger reserve (Fig. 1) at around 21:00 hr IST. It was sighted on a small temporarily wooden roof c. 2m above ground. Identification of the species is based on observation of its distinct body pattern and colouration. Body slender, slightly compressed laterally. The head is triangular in shape and distinct from neck. Top of head with a conspicuous black mid bar from the frontal shield to the nape with two more additional stripes parallel to it (Fig. 2A). Eyes are large with vertical pupil and a broad black stripe run behind the eye to the angle of mouth. Supralabials and infralabials are whitish with few black spots. The dorsal coloration is greyish with alternating irregular transverse markings giving it a checkered pattern (Fig. 2B). Color form of the species encountered falls in "variety 1" as described by Mohapatra *et al.* (2009).

After observations and photography, the snake climbed vertically on *Psidium guajava* and later it

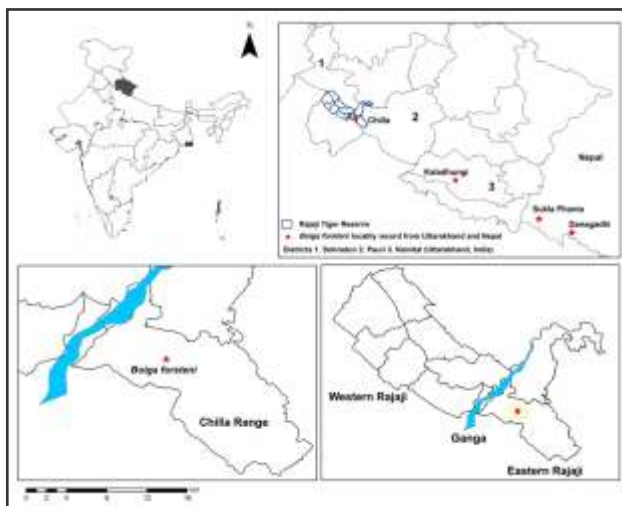


Fig. 1: Map showing northernmost locality report of *B. forsteni* from India



Fig. 2: *Boiga forsteni* variety 1 (A) dorsal view (arrow showing black mid-stripe on head and two parallel stripes on the neck) (B) front view of *B. forsteni*.

disappeared in nearby bush which is about 2m in height. The area where the snake was encountered is located in between a terai grassland (approximately 65.47 ha) dominated by *Saccharum spontaneum* with sparse trees. Surrounding habitat is predominantly a *Shorea robusta* dominated forest. The species known to inhabit woodland habitats in dry deciduous forest, moist deciduous, peninsular Sal forest and cultivated areas in

holes of *Madhuca indica*, *Mangifera indica* and also found in holes of large trees near forest fringe villages (Schleich and Kästle, 2002; Mohapatra *et al.*, 2009). Beside *B. forsteni* few other species of snakes were also encountered occasionally in the park. The species spotted were *Ophiophagus hannah*, *Naja kaouthia*, *Bungarus fasciatus* and *Lycodon aulicus*.

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