

REPTILES OF CENTRAL NEPAL

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INTRODUCTION

The herpetofauna of Nepal comes from four zoogeographical subregions — the Indian, Indo Chinese, West Chinese and Mediterranean.

The dominant plains, lower foothills and Valley species are from the Indian subregion and generally do not extend into the mountains. The Indo Chinese are largely coexistent with these. From the Mediterranean subregion come species that extend in range down to Nepal from Kashmir and in some cases the Red Sea. These species on the whole have a wide altitudinal range. Representatives of the Chinese subregion are found mainly at higher altitudes.

BIOTOPES

The areas of Central Nepal I visited were the Royal Chitwan National Park, Tharu (a village outside the Park), the Kathmandu and Pokhara Valleys and the Langtang National Park.

The Royal National Chitwan Park is mainly comprised of sal forest, elephant grass and tropical deciduous rain forest. The latter two occur on the lower, wetter ground along the river courses. The temperature varied from 27/28°C on cloudy days to 30°, sometimes perhaps a little more, on sunny.

Where not cultivated the forest of the Kathmandu Valley and surrounding hills is predominantly of pine and oak species with some mixed temperate broad-leaved trees. At the height at which I found lizards in the Langtang Park, six to seven thousand feet, the slopes were grass covered with the odd juniper and rhododendron shrub or conifer.

LIST OF SPECIES

Sauria

Gekkonidae

Cosymbotus platyurus (Schneider)

Found living in and on buildings in the Kathmandu Valley (in Kathmandu, Patan and Godawari). Most abundant in Godawari.

Hemidactylus brooki (Gray)

The commonest gecko I found, occurring in the Chitwan Park, Tharu, Trisuli Bazaar, Pokhara and Kathmandu and often living in association with other geckoes in buildings.

Hemidactylus flaviridis (Rüppell)

Found in Pokhara in or on houses only. As with all geckoes I came across, except *H. garnoti*, it is nocturnal emerging at dusk from the eaves or roofs of buildings.

Hemidactylus frenatus (Schlegel)

Found in Tharu living in association with *H. brooki*. Both species abundant.

Hemidactylus garnoti (Duméril and Bibron)

A shy gecko only seen in buildings when empty. It is diurnal, most sightings occurring between 9 and 10 in the morning. Found in the Chitwan Park.

Agamidae

Agama tuberculata (Hardwicke and Gray)

Occurs in fairly large numbers in the Langtang Park at heights of six to seven thousand feet, living in rocks on grassy slopes.

Calotes versicolor (Daudin)

A diurnal, arboreal lizard found in sal and riverine forest and elephant grass in Chitwan. Also common in gardens where it was found in Tharu, Kathmandu and Godawari.

Scincidae

Mabuya dissimilis (Hallowell)

Several individuals found in the garden of Tharu Lodge foraging through the leaf litter. Males had red flanks indicative of it being the breeding season (sightings were in early July).

Scincella sikkimensis (Blyth)

One individual seen on a patch of bare earth on a grass bank at Tharu.

Varanidae

Varanus bengalensis (Schneider)

One individual seen in Patan.

Serpentes

Colubridae

Lycodon aulicus (Linnaeus)

One individual seen moving down a wall of the lodge at Tharu. This is one of the most common snakes of the Indian plains and is often found living near human habitations, sometimes even in houses between the ceiling and roof.

Crocodylia

Crocodylidae

Crocodylus palustris (Lesson)

Found in the Chitwan Park along the water courses and in pools in the swamper parts of the elephant grass.

Gavialis gangeticus (Gmelin)

Two individuals seen on a mud bank of the Narayani River, Chitwan. As approached they slipped into the water.

DISCUSSION

Of the thirteen species listed queried identifications are *Hemidactylus garnoti* and *Scincella sikkimensis*. *H. garnoti* appeared in some aspects to be intermediate between *H. garnoti* and *H. karenorum*. The similarities with the latter were in having postmentals contacting infralabials and perhaps in stronger colouration, but their lack of enlarged tubercles placed them with *garnoti*. Both species are parthenogenic. *S. sikkimensis* was a tentative identification, the *Scincella* being a difficult group that is currently undergoing revision.

Though *Mabuya dissimilis* has been previously recorded from North India, Pakistan and Kashmir and Jammu this is the first firm record of them in Nepal. *Calotes versicolor* and *Hemidactylus brooki* were the most frequently observed species; the

Calotes can be found in most biotopes up to a height of approximately six thousand feet. *Gavialis gangeticus*, though rare in Nepal generally, is becoming common in the Chitwan Park due to a breeding programme being carried out there.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank A.V.J. Edwards, J. Edwards and ITNC for their financial support; R. Potter and Dr. B. King of Stowe School; and Dr. Arnold and Dr. McCarthy of the British Museum (Natural History) for their help both with the writing of the project and with the identification of the lizards.

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