Saw-scaled Viper with ocular damage in Valsad, Gujarat

*Echis carinatus* (Schneider, 1801) commonly called the Saw-scaled Viper is found throughout India except West Bengal and the north-east (Whitaker & Captain 2004), and reaches the lower Himalayan region (Ananjeva et al. 2021). It has a relatively small and short, wide, pear-shaped head distinct from the neck. The body is moderately slender and cylindrical, the dorsal scales are mostly keeled. However, the scales on the lower flanks stick out at a distinct 45° angle and have a central ridge, or keel, that is serrated, the tail is short and the subcaudals are single (Mallow et al. 2003). The species possesses a rounded snout and large independently evolved image-forming eyes in over 40 lineages (Salvini-Plawen &
Mayr 1977), optimizing prey recognition through olfactory and chemical senses. However, eye damage poses a survival threat as they’ve adapted from nocturnal to colour vision for enhanced light capture in low-light conditions (Simões et al. 2016).

At about 1800 h on 12 March 2022 in Pandev Hill Station, Valsad (20.5028 N, 73.3238 E), Gujarat, India, while crossing the natural trails we observed a Saw-scaled Viper approximately 23 cm in length, upon much closer observation we noticed that it had a damaged left eye. Above the amputated eyeball the dried optical veins could be seen clearly with a damaged pupil. The exact reason for this is however unknown, and this is an interesting documentation of a reptilian species demonstrating its survival instinct in the wild and being able to find its prey. Previously, similar instances in other snake species have been reported (Patel et al. 2022).

References


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