

# KING COBRA

## Sighting of a *Ophiophagus hannah* (Cantor, 1836) in Assam University, Silchar Campus, Cachar, India



The King Cobra (*Ophiophagus hannah*) displayed its hood beside a road in AUS campus and next it moved to the forest area. Photo: Priyanka Pachani

**IUCN Red List:**  
Vulnerable  
(Stuart et al. 2012)

**Reptilia**  
[Class of Reptiles]

**Squamata**  
[Order of Scaled reptiles]

**Elapidae**  
[Family of Venomous Snakes]

***Ophiophagus hannah***  
[King Cobra]

Species described by  
Cantor in 1836

The Assam University, Silchar (AUS) is spread over an area of about 572 acres (Reang et al. 2018), located around 20km away to the south of Silchar in Cachar District of Assam (24°41'N & 92°45'E). The vegetation around the university campus represents a secondary growth succession status. Whereas majority of the area is occupied by degraded forest land (Reang et al. 2018). Apart from the constructed buildings within the campus, the ecoforest (an undisturbed forest patch) of the campus extends towards the eastern periphery of Silcoorie Tea Estate. The forest type is represented by Cachar Tropical Evergreen Forest (1B/C3) and Cachar Tropical Semi-evergreen Forest (2B/C2) (Champion & Seth 1968). The vegetation of the ecoforest site is dominated by *Artocarpus chama* and *Tetrameles nudiflora* as the top layer, the middle layer is represented by *Ficus* spp., *Artocarpus lacucha*, etc., and the lower layer represented by *Schizostachyum dulooa* and saplings of *Mimosa himalayana*, *Goniothalamus*,

*Cyclostemon*, etc. The degraded forest land is dominated by *Combretum* sp., *Melastoma* sp., *Eupatorium odoratum*, *Macaranga* sp. etc. (Dutta et al. 2008).

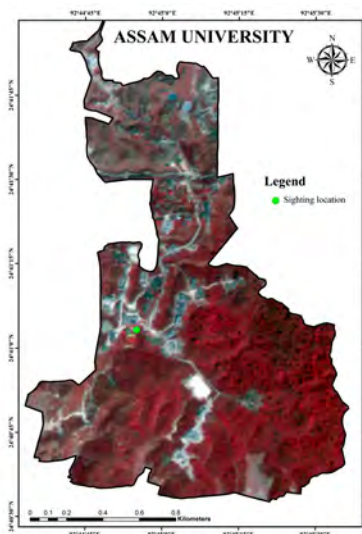
On 20 April 2018, at around 14:30hr, a large snake of almost three meter length was reported near the Department of Visual & Arts in Assam University, Silchar campus (24°41.069N & 92°44.919E). The snake was identified as King Cobra *Ophiophagus hannah* by observing the hood display, presence of narrow white 'N' bands on the hood and a distinct broad head, apart from its other morphological features (Ahmed et al. 2009). Dorsally the snake was dark brown with a black tail whereas the head was slightly pale in colour. It was seen displaying its hood two times for a few seconds and searching for a place to avoid people and vehicles on the road. The snake was observed for three minutes; it was trying to enter through holes of a brick wall; at last it climbed 2m up to the undergrowth of *Combretum* sp.

**Global Distribution :**  
Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar, China, Cambodia, Brunei Darussalam, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam. (Stuart et al. 2012)

Current IUCN status of the snake is Vulnerable and population trend has been decreasing (Stuart et al. 2012). The species has been regarded as widespread in south and southeast Asia, although not common in its large distributional range (David & Vogel

1996). In northeastern India, it was reported from wide variety of habitats such as primary wet evergreen and semi-evergreen forest, tall alluvial grasslands, mid elevation broad-leaved forest and also around human habitation (Das et al. 2008).

Twenty-four species of snakes are recorded from the AUS (Dutta et al. 2008). In Barak Valley, King Cobra has been reported from Barail Wildlife Sanctuary (Das et al. 2009). In the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam, the species has been



**Sighting location of King Cobra *Ophiophagus hannah* in Assam University, Silchar Campus (Map was produced by ArcGIS 10.4 with LISS IV data)**

reported from Dibrugarh, Tezpur, Margherita and North Cachar Hill District (Wall 1909), Garbhanga Reserved Forest and the Kulsi River side of Kamrup District (Mathew 1983; Sengupta et al. 2000), Bansbari, Kasimdaha and the Kuribeel grassland of Manas National Park (Narayan & Rosalind 1989), fringe areas of Kaziranga National Park in Golaghat district, Nambor Wildlife Sanctuary, Guijan Village near Dibru Saikhowa National Park, Kakojan Reserved Forest and Potasali camp of Nameri Tiger Reserve (Das et al. 2008).



In India, it is protected under Scheduled-II of the Wildlife (Protection), Act 1972. The present report represents the first photographic evidence of King Cobra within the university campus. The existing protected ecoforest of AUS may provide a safe habitat for this species. Awareness among local people might go a long way in saving this majestic reptile in our ecosystem.

#### References

- Ahmed, M.F., A. Das & S.K. Dutta (2009).** *Amphibians and Reptiles of Northeast India - A Photographic Guide*. Aaranyak, Guwahati, India.
- Champion, H.G. & S.K. Seth (1968).** *Forest Types of India*. Forest Research Institute, Dehradun.
- Das, A., M.V. Nair, M.F. Ahmed & P.K. Sharma (2008).** Distribution of King Cobra (*Ophiophagus hannah*) in Northeastern India with new altitudinal record and notes on its habitat. *Tigerpaper* 35(4): 1–6.
- Das, A., U. Saikia, B.H.C.K. Murthy, S. Dey & S.K. Dutta (2009).** A herpetofaunal inventory of Barail Wildlife Sanctuary and adjacent regions, Assam, northeastern India. *Hamadryad* 34(1): 117–134.
- David, P. & G. Vogel (1996).** *The Snakes of Sumatra: An Annotated Checklist and Key with Natural History Notes*. Edition Chimaira, Frankfurt-Am-Main, Germany, 260pp.
- Dutta, B.K., A. Gupta, A.K. Das & A. De (2008).** Ecology and Biodiversity of Assam University Campus, Department of Ecology and Environmental Science, Assam University, Silchar, India.
- Mathew R. (1983).** On a collection of snakes from northeast India (Reptilia-Serpentes). *Records of Zoological Survey of India* XII: 343-354
- Narayan, G. & L. Rosalind (1989).** King Cobra in grassland; an unusual habitat. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 87(2): 309.
- Reang, D., A. De & A.K. Das (2018).** Spatial analysis of land use/ land cover from IRS-R2 LISS4 FMX data: A case study in Assam University Campus, India. *NeBIO* 9(1): 134–143.
- Sengupta, S., M. Barua, N.K. Choudhury & J. Gogoi (2000).** Herpetological investigation at Garbhanga Reserved Forest Assam. *Journal of Assam Science* 41(4): 372–378.
- Stuart, B., G. Wogan, L. Grismer, M. Auliya, R.F. Inger, R. Lilley, T. Chan-Ard, N. Thy, T.Q. Nguyen, C. Srinivasulu & D. Jelić (2012).** *Ophiophagus hannah*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2012: e. T177540A1491874. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2012-1.RLTS.T177540A1491874.en>. Downloaded on 02 May 2018.
- Wall, F. (1909).** Notes on snakes collected in upper Assam. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* xix: 608–623 (Part I); xix: 825–845 (Part II).

**Acknowledgements:** The first author is thankful to Dr. Hilloljyoti Singha, Dr. Panna Deb, Dr. Aparajita De and Mohammad Miraj Hussain for their guidance and support during preparation of the manuscript and he would like to thank Pranab Dey, Surajit Chanda, Sandeep Das, Rajat Nandi, Deep Bhowmik and Dipak Sarkar for assisting in the field.

**Sibam Sarkar<sup>1</sup>, Priyanka Pachani<sup>2</sup>, Mithra Dey<sup>3</sup> & Demsai Reang<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1,3&4</sup> Department of Ecology and Environmental Science, Assam University, Silchar, Cachar, Assam 788011, India.

Email: [1shibamsarkar831@gmail.com](mailto:1shibamsarkar831@gmail.com) (Corresponding author)

<sup>2</sup> Department of Visual & Arts, Assam University, Silchar, Cachar, Assam 788011, India.

Citation: Sarkar, S., P. Pachani, M. Dey & D. Reang (2018). King Cobra: Sighting of a *Ophiophagus hannah* (Cantor, 1836) in Assam University, Silchar Campus, Cachar, India. *Reptile Rap* #188. In: *Zoo's Print* 33(11): 09–11