

Distribution record of *Python bivittatus* in Amangarh Tiger Reserve, Uttar Pradesh, India



The adult Burmese Python *Python bivittatus* observed in Amangarh Tiger Reserve, Uttar Pradesh. © Prajakta Hushangbadkar, WWF-India

Pythons are non-venomous snakes belonging to the family Pythonidae. Out of the 31 species of pythons found worldwide, three, i.e., Reticulated Python *Malayopython reticulatus*, Indian Rock Python *Python molurus*, and Burmese Python *Python bivittatus*, are found in India. Earlier, the Burmese Python was considered as a subspecies of the Indian Rock Python (Whitaker & Captain 2004) but was later described as a new species by Jacobs et al. (2009). Morphologically, both species can be differentiated based on identification features given by Smith (1943), O'Shea (1998), and Whitaker & Captain (2004)—in the Indian Rock Python, the skin has a more yellowish tone, the sixth or seventh labial (supralabial) is in contact with the eye, the

lance-shaped mark on top of the head is indistinct, and the tongue is pink in adults while in the Burmese Python, the skin is light coloured with dark brown blotches bordered in black, the sixth supralabial is separated from the eye by a single subocular scale, the lance-shaped mark on the head is clear, and the tongue is blue-black in colour.

The Burmese Python is native to various parts of southeastern Asia and is reported to occur in eastern India, Nepal, Bangladesh, southern China including Hong Kong and Hainan, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Indonesia (Barker & Barker 2008, 2010) and is absent in peninsular Malaysia, Borneo, and Sumatra (Barker & Barker 2008). In India, detailed information



Sighting location of the Burmese Python in Amangarh Tiger Reserve, Uttar Pradesh, India

on the distribution of the Burmese Python is yet to be well-documented; however, continuous efforts to understand the distribution of the species added three new records of its isolated subpopulation: (1) the Corbett-Rajaji subpopulation in Uttarakhand (Bhupathy 1995; Nawab & Srivastava 2008; Joshi & Singh 2015), (2) the northeastern subpopulation along the Brahmaputra (Barker & Barker 2008), and (3) the eastern subpopulation in Kolkata and Bhitarkanika National Park (Barker & Barker 2008). Moreover, the species was also reported from in and outside other Protected Areas of the country such as Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary in Meerut and Sumera Block in the outskirts of Aligarh in Uttar Pradesh

(Yadav et al. 2017; Rashid & Khan 2018).

The species is reported to thrive well in marshes and swamps; however, forested areas including mangroves and rainforests, grasslands, coastal plains, and rocky foothills also provide a good habitat for this snake (O'Shea 1998; Barker & Barker 2008). It feeds on various prey species according to its body size, preferring mostly small to large mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians (Daniel 2002). In India, the Burmese Python is protected under law and is listed as Schedule I species under the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. Habitat loss, poaching for skin, and use of body parts in traditional medicine declined the population of the species resulting in its categorization as Vulnerable in the IUCN Red List of Threatened species (Stuart et al. 2012). It is also listed under Appendix II of CITES.

We sighted an adult Burmese Python in Amangarh Tiger Reserve (hereafter ATR) on 09 December 2018. ATR is located in the Himalayan foothills in district Bijnor of Uttar Pradesh (29.4027°N & 78.865°E). When Uttarakhand was carved out in 2002, Amangarh remained in Uttar Pradesh and its whole 81km² area was notified as buffer of Corbett Tiger Reserve in July 2012. As part of the All India Tiger Estimation Program 2018, camera trapping was conducted in ATR to monitor its tiger population. During the routine checkup of deployed camera traps, we came across a python basking next to *Lantana* sp. bushes near Pili Dam in Lalpuri



Beat (29.3531°N & 78.8061°E). The bulge near its belly suggested that it had preyed on some small mammal species, which slowed down its movement and allowed us to click some images. The characteristics of the observed individual were later compared with those described by Smith (1943), Daniel (2002), and Whitaker & Captain (2004) and were found to be similar to that of the Burmese Python.

The population of the species is facing a rapid decline owing to unplanned development throughout its range. Intentional fires set by humans to burn agricultural residue may also pose a serious threat to this species by diminishing its prey (Stuart et al. 2012). Since little is known about the species, intensive studies on its ecology are needed to develop better management strategies for its long-term conservation.

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