

## Record of King Cobra preying on Tawny Cat Snake in Nepal



Envenomation by *Ophiophagus hannah*.

*Ophiophagus hannah* (Cantor, 1836), commonly known as King cobra or Hamadryad, is the world's largest venomous snake that belongs to the family Elapidae. Its body is fairly stout in adults, slender in juveniles and the flat head is distinct from neck; which is capable of dilating into an elongated hood (Schleich & Kästle 2002; Pandey 2015; Das & Das 2017). King Cobra has a large pair of occipital scales in contrast to common cobras. The dorsal colour is variable: dark brown, olive-brown or grey-black, with pale yellow or orange bands in young that may or may not persist in adults

(Schleich & Kästle 2002; Sharma 2007; Kästle et al. 2013; Das & Das 2017). King cobra is endemic to forests of India and it was first reported in Nepal from Rautahat District (Fleming & Fleming 1974). As per latest literature, King Cobra has been reported in 37 districts of Nepal (Thapa et al. 2019). This magnificent snake is globally threatened mainly due to habitat destruction, illegal collection, and persecution (Stuart et al. 2012).

Here, I report the sighting of King Cobra (26.710°N & 87.905°E) for the first time from

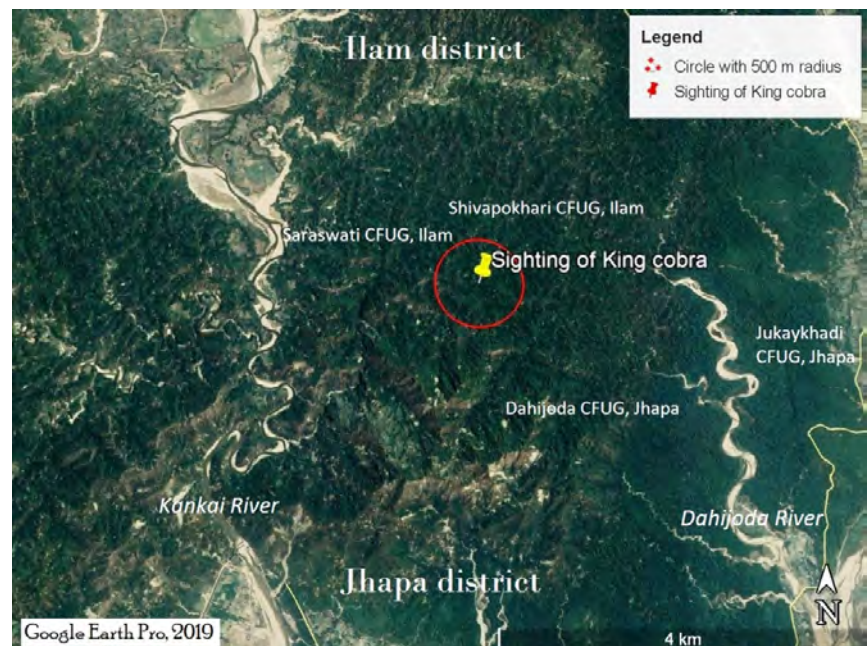


**Ilam District in Nepal.**

southern Danabari of Mai municipality, ward number 2 in Ilam District, eastern Nepal. During the field survey in dense forest that connects southern Ilam and northern Jhapa districts, on 19 October 2019 at 14.05h a King Cobra was encountered preying on Tawny Cat Snake *Boiga ochracea* (Theobald, 1868) at an elevation of 190m above sea level. Though the site is located in Ilam, this portion of the forest is managed by Dahijoda Community Forest Users Group (CFUG) of Arjundhara municipality, ward number 4, Jhapa. In fact, this particular area is a merging point of three community forests, namely Shivapokhari CFUG-

Ilam in the north, Dahijoda CFUG-Jhapa in the south, and Saraswati CFUG-Ilam in the northwest area. Initially, the King Cobra envenomed at anterior

body of its prey and slowly moved towards the head region to swallow it. On further observation, it abandoned the semi unconscious snake and escaped into the forest. The habitat consists of dense wet forest with bamboos and a hill stream known as ‘Thulo Khola’ (Nepali: Big stream). Three individuals of skink *Sphenomorphus maculatus* and one gecko *Cyrtodayctylus* sp. (26.708°N & 87.906°E) were observed in the vicinity. *Boiga ochracea* was reported from Puwa Khola, Ilam by Nanhoe & Ouboter (1987); and this observation is after 32 years.



**Location of *Ophiophagus hannah*.**



*Ophiophagus hannah* biting head of prey to swallow it.



In situ habitat of *Ophiophagus hannah*.

The total body length of *Boiga ochracea* is measured 92cm with snout vent length of 84cm, and tail length of 8cm.

The total districts of King cobra occurrences have increased to 38 in Nepal. This finding of live *Ophiophagus hannah* is

equally valid for Jhapa District due to its location and connectivity of forests in that area. Distribution of *Ophiophagus hannah* is important for its conservation and mitigation of probable human-snake interaction in the area.

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**Acknowledgements:** I would like to thank Dahijoda CFUG and its President Mr. Khagendra Subba for genial facilitation in the field survey. I am grateful to ARCO-Nepal, Mechi Multiple Campus and Division Forest Office (Jhapa and Ilam) for providing the necessary help. Lastly, I am obliged to Professor Kaluram Rai, Sabin Adhikari, Sher Bahadur Tamang, and Saroj Chauhan for their valuable support in different ways to accomplish this research.

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Citation: Rai, T.P. (2020). Record of King Cobra preying on Tawny Cat Snake in Nepal. *Reptile Rap* #198, In: *Zoo's Print* 35(4): 08–11.

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