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Recent rare sightings of four different snakes in Gauhati University Campus, Assam, India

There are 304 species of snakes belonging to 34 families so far recorded in India (Aengals et al. 2018). The prime objective of this note was to record a few rare sightings of snakes encountered during their rescue operation from human habitat since June 2018 in the Gauhati University campus (26.1541N, 91.6630E), Guwahati, Assam and release into nearby Jalukbari Reserve Forest. Gauhati University campus is dotted with rivulets, grasslands, plains, hills, narrow valleys and the campus's southern boundary is primarily made up of hills rising to a height of 168 m. Its northern boundary is primarily made up of wetlands while in east-west direction, the national highway 37 passes (Bhattacharya 2022). Till date four rare sightings have



Rescue of *Trimeresurus salazar* by Tikendrajit Gogoi. © Manab Jyoti Kalita.



Rescued *Trimeresurus salazar*. © Manab Jyoti Kalita.

Table: Rare sightings of snakes from Gauhati University campus.

	Common name	Scientific name	Family	Category
1	Salazar’s Pit Viper	<i>Trimeresurus salazar</i>	Viperidae	Venomous
2	Red-necked Keelback	<i>Rhabdophis subminiatus</i>	Natricidae	Venomous
3	Ornate Flying Snake	<i>Chrysopelea ornata</i>	Colubridae	Mild venomous
4	Light-barred Kukri Snake	<i>Oligodon albocinctus</i>	Colubridae	Non venomous



The sighted Red-necked Keelback. © Tikendrajit Gogoi.

been made in the campus, namely, *Trimeresurus salazar*, *Rhabdophis subminiatus*, *Chrysopelea ornata*, *Oligodon albocinctus*.

Mirza et al. 2020 described about the Salazar’s Pit Viper *Trimeresurus salazar* from Pakke Tiger Reserve, Arunachal Pradesh. The *Trimeresurus salazar* is the only species in northeastern India with an orange/reddish postocular stripe in males head from behind the eyes to the nape (as opposed to others without stripes, white stripe or red

and white stripes) and body coloration of yellowish-green (as opposed in to deep green in other species) (Rathee et al. 2021). This long and slender snake with the above identifying characters was sighted in the backyard of AT-6 Boy’s hostel, Gauhati University during monsoon season on 02 July 2022.

The Red-necked Keelback *Rhabdophis subminiatus* has reddish neck, olive green in colour with faint yellow-black markings and has eight number of supralabial scales along with

three-five scales near the eye (Ranade 2022). It is most commonly sighted near or on the banks of water bodies like streams, ponds, rivers along with wet grasslands, marshy areas and even in agricultural areas like rice fields (<https://indiabiodiversity.org/>). These identifying characters matched with sighted Keelback at the University campus. It was sighted inside the Botany Department Laboratory, Gauhati University during retreating monsoon on the 03 October 2021.

The Ornate Flying Snake *Chrysopelea ornata* is light green in colour, long-slender snake with black crossbars and reddish spots that are present alternately. It has a wide distribution in India with sighting records from entire northeast, certain regions of Gujarat and central India as well as Western Ghats (<https://indiabiodiversity.org/>). Furthermore, although Ahmed et al. 2009, recorded its presence in northeast India, reports on its sighting are almost scanty in the area. As described by Dutta (2015) its head is flattened, snout depressed, has spots on side

and with light green belly. The aforementioned characters matched the one we have sighted. It was sighted on the terrace of RCC-5 Boys' hostel, Gauhati University during monsoon season on 19 August 2020.

The Light-barred Kukri *Oligodon albocinctus* snake has entire cloacal plate, complete head scalation and dorsal part with blotches or pale crossbars (David et al. 2012). *Oligodon* is one of the largest genera of snakes in Asia having near about 75 recognized species (Green et al. 2010; David & Vogel 2012). It is well distributed in Asia including India, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, China, and Nepal. In India, it has been recorded from Assam, Sikkim, and north Bengal (<https://indiabiodiversity.org/>). These external features match with the one we encountered during pre-monsoon season near the wetland of Gauhati University Model High School on 27 May 2018.

Since lower trophic level species are necessary for the survival of higher trophic level organisms, the study area



The sighted Ornate Flying Snake. © Tikendrajit Gogoi.



The sighted Light-barred Kukri. © Tikendrajit Gogoi.

has the potential to support a variety of herpetofauna. Furthermore, such unusual encounters indicate the

possible habitat of various species of rare as well as more common snakes on the campus.



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