



A report on a road kill of Burmese Python from Guwahati, Assam

The Burmese Python *Python bivittatus* Khul, 1820 is considered one of the largest snake species in the world, and it can grow up to a length of 6 m (20 ft.) (Clark 2012).

P. bivittatus is a squamate reptile of the Pythonidae family, the top of the body is dark brownish or yellowish-grey, with a series of 30–40 large irregular squarish, black-edged, dark chocolate-grey blotches on the top and sides of the body; it has dark and dark grey dorsal and lateral spots; it has a sub-ocular stripe; and the belly is greyish with dark spots on the outer scale rows. The body is thick and cylindrical; the head is lance-shaped and distinct from the neck; sensory pits can be found in the rostrals as well as on some supralabials and infralabials.



The road killed Burmese Python in Guwahati, Assam. © Nikshit Barman.



The tail is short and prehensile; and there are cloacal spurs (Das 2012).

In India, the Burmese Python is protected under the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and is listed under schedule I which provides the species the highest level of protection. It is listed as 'Vulnerable' (VU) on the IUCN Red List and is included in CITES Appendix II (CITES 2019). The distribution of *P. bivittatus* in southern and southeastern Asia encompasses eastern parts of India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, northern Malaysia, and southern China (Barker & Barker 2010). In the native range, it dwells in the tropical lowlands, grassland forests, and within areas modified for human use (Cota 2010). Little is known about its status and distribution in India, largely because the Burmese Python until recently was considered a subspecies of the Indian Rock Python *Python molurus*, with which it is frequently confused.

Here we are reporting a road kill record of a Burmese Python from Guwahati, Assam. On 16 July 2023 at 0610h, one of us (NB) encountered a vehicle killed Python on the NH 17 near Lankeshwar (26.1476 N & 91.6470 E, 77 m) which is close to the Jalukbari Reserve Forest. Upon inspection, we found that the Python (approx. 3.3 m) was killed while trying to cross the highway from a nearby swamp area to a hill, located on the other side of the road, which connects to the Deepor Beel Wildlife Sanctuary.

Roads serve as one of the most crucial components of human life since civilization

and urbanization began, at the same time modify and degrade the natural environment. Reduction of natural habitats is considered a global threat to biodiversity conservation (Geneletti 2003). Roadways can pose substantial threats to the movement of local wildlife, ranging from habitat alteration and modification to disruption of animal distribution and movement, when they pass through protected areas. This can affect breeding density, heterozygosity and survival due to mortality from vehicular collisions.

The Reserve Forest nearby where the Python was found dead also harbours other wildlife such as Common Leopard *Panthera pardus*, Golden Jackal *Canis aureus*, Small Indian Mongoose *Herpestes auropunctatus*, Hoary-bellied Squirrel *Callosciurus pygerythrus* and herpetofauna such as Monocled Cobra *Naja kaouthia*, Green Pit Viper *Trimeresurus salazar* etc. Most of this wildlife is often encountered crossing the highway and nearby roads. This record could be documented because of the large size of python. Many other smaller organisms including amphibians, birds and even reptiles and mammals are frequently run over by vehicles but remain unnoticed. The rapidly increasing traffic pressure in an ever expanding (Mahananda & Jelil 2017) and developing Guwahati City worsens the case of such incidents. Wildlife populations are adversely affected by the process of urbanization and poor imposition of traffic rules further worsen the impacts. Such incidents of road kills of animals clearly present the harsh reality of the threats we humans are imposing on the wildlife through developmental activity.



As per the National Highway Authority of India, the country has the second largest road system in the world, covering approximately 5.89 million km of road stretch, which in length is after the USA (Sur et al. 2023). Considering this vast network of roads in concoction with the incessant anthropogenic factors like habitat alteration, alien species invasions, and climate change, the impact of roads on wildlife cannot be overlooked (Erritzoe et al. 2003). It is therefore our responsibility to understand the interaction of wildlife with linear intrusion such as roadways and provide them with safe passage so that a peaceful coexistence prevails and such mortality of wildlife is reduced.

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