

NOTE ON THE INDIAN ROCK PYTHON, *PYTHON MOLURUS*, AT SAYYAJI BAUG ZOO

Raju Vyas

Sayaji Baug Zoo, Vadodara, Gujarat 390018, India.

The Indian Rock Python (*Python molurus*) is widely distributed in Gujarat State. Data over the last few years (Table 1) of rescued and injured pythons show that southern Gujarat area still holds a good population of the species compared to other parts of the state.

During last eight years (1990-1998) Sayaji Baug Zoo, Vadodara, Gujarat received five adult pythons from GNFC Wildlife Complex and State Forest Department. Two were injured and the remaining were sick.

Sayaji Baug Zoo received a female python on 30 September 1996. She was rescued by the reporter of a local newspaper from Bhojpar Village of Sankheda, Vadodara. The python was badly cut from the jaw joint running laterally for 20cm. The cut had opened the anterior portion of the digestive track. A local shepherd had injured the animal with a long metal arrow. As soon as the animal was received by the zoo, it weighed 15kg and measured 3.12m from snout to tip of the tail. The injured part was cleaned with mild solution of antiseptic and tranquilized. After 30 minutes the wound was stitched with nylon sutures. First, the inner suture to stitch the oesophagus. This time a nylon suture was used instead of cat-gut, because it was observed from an earlier experience that when the inner body organ of an injured python was stitched with cat-gut, the stitches got diluted by the digestive acidic enzymes and the inner digestive track opened up after three days. The second layer of suture was to the skin (Table 2).

Regular care was taken, antiseptic lotion was applied on the sutured part to prevent infection. Antibiotics were injected once in five days as per veterinary doctor's prescription. The temperature of the cage was maintained so that the night temperature did not drop below 22°C during the winter. Since a reptiles metabolism is dependent on the ambient temperature, maintaining the temperature of the reptile's cage is most important, especially when the animal is injured.

The python recovered after the three-week long treatment, the

Table 1. List of rescued wild *P. m. molurus* in Gujarat State.

Date	Area	Sex	Rescued agency/ name of person
28.vi.90	Bharuch	F	GNFC, Cap, Tirubhai
25.vii.90	Bodeli, Vadodara Dist.	F	GSFD, D.N. Narve
30.viii.90	Jagadiya, Bharuch Dist.	M	GNFC, Cap. Tirubhai
01.x.90	Virpur, Padara, Vadodara Dist.	F	Local people
18.ix.91	Vanar, Chotaudipur, Vadodara Dist.	F	GSFD, D. Vora
22.ii.96	Atul, Valsad Dist.	F	WWF-I, N. Patel
24.ii.96	Atul, Valsad Dist.	F	WWF-I, N. Patel
20.iv.96	Waghodia, Vadodara Dist.	F	GSFD, K.L. Ladwa
Apr. 96	Bharuch	M	GSFC, Cap. Tirubhai.
Apr. 96	Bharuch	F	GSFC, Cap. Tirubhai
30.ix.96	Bhojpur, Sankheda, Vadodara Dist.	F	Local people
06.iv.98	Shaktipura, Jarod, Vadodara, Dist.	M	GSPCA
15.xi.98	Chapad, Padara, Vadodara Dist.	F	Killed by local villagers
16.xi.98	Chapad, Padara, Vadodara Dist.	?	GSPCA

Table 2. Treatment card: Indian Rock Python (*P. m. molurus*)

Date	Treatment	Medicine and dose
01.x.96	# Injured part cleaning	Mild solution of Savalon and Betadine
	# Tranquilizing	Ketmin (ketamine hydrochloride injection) 2ml/100 mg.
	# Stitches and dressing	Two layered sutured on cut with Nylon tread and dressing with Pendistrin-Sh ointment
	# Analgesic injection	
03.x.96	# Antibiotic and dressing	Amphiciline 1 ml/250 mg injected intra muscular and dressed injured part with Pendistrin-Sh ointment
08.x.96	# Antibiotic and dressing	Same as above
27.x.96	# Removed stitches and	Outer layer of all sutured removed dressing and dressing with Betadine solution and antiseptic waterproof sprayed

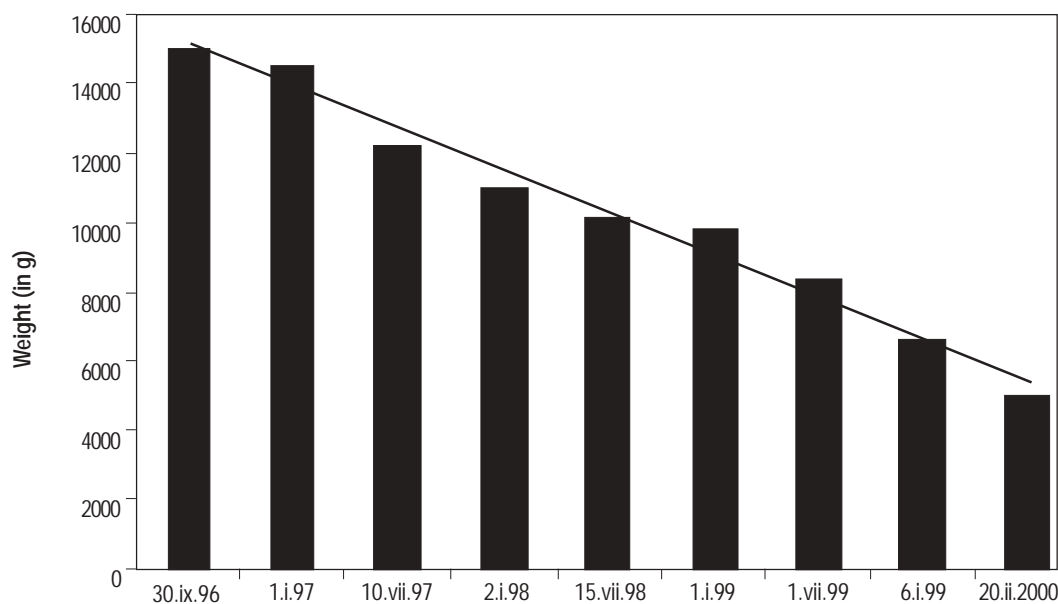


Figure 1. Weight loss in *Python molurus* in captivity

injured part was healed and the outer stitches were removed. During the treatment the python moulted once.

On 28 October, I offered a small-sized live rabbit but she did not take any interest in the rabbit -- a usual phenomenon in newly-caught snakes. However, she did not take any interest in eating food after the first week of November 1996. The python was reexamined very carefully to check if the nylon stitches were creating problems while eating, but it seemed normal. She only drank water although I offered live rabbit, chicken, rat, fish and also dead pigeon. I also tried force-feeding her with a big rat in first week of December 1996, but she rejected that food. I attributed her lack of interest in food to the winter season and also that wild snakes do not accept food easily.

Therefore, I recorded the weight and behavior of the python regularly. In the second week of January 1997, I introduced a pair of adult pythons in the same cage with the hope of improving her behavior through watching the others eat. But this did not elicit any interest for food in her. In the month of February, I observed that she mated with the introduced male python, which indicated that she was in good health. She moulted again in May 1997. However, she continued to refuse food.

I offered a live pigeon every fifteen days but she refused it and only drank water. She survived almost a year without food. I consulted various veterinarians about the condition, but none of them knew the reason for her behaviour. I concluded that the operation did not rejoin the jaw properly and that the nerve receptors might have been badly damaged.

She was kept in a separate cage and her body weight was recorded regularly (Fig. 1). She finally died without food during aestivation. This is the longest-ever record of a python living without food in captivity and post-operation.

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