extending from behind dorsal fin and continuing upto the low ridge formed by the upper procurrent caudal fin rays.

Akysis has only been reported from Java, Sumatra, Borneo, Tenasserim, Thailand and only as far as upper Burma. Its extension westwards and towards Chindwin has been confirmed by the recent collections. The paper extends the distribution of the genus to India.

Comparative Material

Akysis variegatus variegatus Prasad and Mukerji, (= *A. prashadi*) Type F 10873/1 (in ZSI, Calcutta). Southern end of Indawgyi Lake and along W. shore near Lonton village, Myitkyina Dt., Burma; B. Chopra. 18-31.x..1926,

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TRADITIONAL BIRD TRAPS OF KAMRUP DISTRICT, ASSAM, INDIA

Girindra Kalita

Sr. Lecturer, Department of Zoology, Guwahati College, Assam
Email: girin_05 @ yahoo.co.in

plus web supplement of 2 pages

Trapping is the activity or practice of capturing or holding animals for various human-use purposes. Since time immemorial, people trap mammals and birds for food, sports or trading. The traps are mainly used for collection of living animals as freshly killed animals are consumed. In some villages in Assam, the trapping of animals is also related to festivals. However, due to the vanishing wildlife in the vicinity of human habitations, this practice is confined to certain localities only. As hunting has been banned legally, fewer people participate in such activities. Moreover, with the concept of conservation of wild animals increasing, the younger generation is less interested about such skills. Except in one case, the entire tradition of trapping of wild animal is now restricted to a few underprivileged, elderly people only.

In Assam, no attempt has yet been made to record this kind of local skill. However, it is observed that such traditional skill has enormous potential for utilizing in various scientific studies. Therefore, an attempt has been made to record some such traditional traps and categorize accordingly as per the nature of the device.

Villages from both sides of the river Brahmaputra in Kamrup district were selected based on local information and newspaper reports. The villages near and in the catchment areas of wetlands were selected for aquatic and semi-aquatic bird traps. Tribal and forest villages and tea garden areas were chosen for aerial bird traps. Firsthand information was gathered through distributing questionnaires among the villagers, after which a physical survey was conducted in the reported areas and individuals involved in this practice were interviewed. The study areas include villages from:
(a) Hajo and Kalitapara; (b) Kamalpur; (c) Kurua; (d) Around Deepar wetland; (e) Around Chandadubi wetland; (f) Around Amchang tea state.

It is observed that the traditional bird traps in the studied areas are basically of four types. These are (a) Snare trap; (b) Cage trap; (c) Net trap; and (d) Gum trap. The season for different bird trapping has been tabulated (Table 1). A brief description of each trapping method is given below.

(a) Snare trap

In this type of trap, a snare knot is used for capturing the bird. Earlier *Muga* (wild silk thread derived from *Antheraea assamica*) was used, while these days nylon thread is used. The snare traps can be further sub divided into five different types *viz.* (i) Rectangular bar trap; (ii) Open bar trap; (iii) Closed, dome-shaped trap; (iv) Pole trap; and (v) Bow trap.

(i) Rectangular bar trap: (Image 1[w]). In this type of trap,

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four rectangular bars (45-48in long x 7.5-8in wide) are placed around a decoy bird. The rectangular bar bears 9-11 compartments. Each compartment is articulated with one snare loop. This trap is placed near paddy field or vicinity to a wetland where specific birds are available. The decoy bird signals specific calls to entice wild birds of same species that then approach for a fight with the decoy, thus getting themselves snared. Birds like Water Hen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*), Purple Moorhen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*), Water Cock (*Gallicrex cinerea*), and whistling teal (*Dendrocygna* spp.) are captured with the help of this trap .

(ii) Open bar trap: (Image 2[w]). In this type of trap 8-10 snare loops are tightened on a bamboo stick of 12-18in size. Ten to 12 such sticks are placed parallel on the ground. The sticks are hidden with soil. Only the snare loops are visible above the ground. Birds are lured with rice. This kind of trap is used only in Hajo area in November-December. Thousands of '*Bulbuli*' (*Pycnonotus cafer*) birds are captured with the help of this trap. The birds are used for a common bird sport, "*Bulbuli Charair Juj*" which is held in the month of January every year on the occasion of *Magh Bihu*. The birds are released immediately after completing the sports.

(iii) Closed dome-shaped trap: (Image 3[w]). This trap is also like that of rectangular bar trap. However, the shape of the bar is like a dome. The upper side of the trap is bound with cross rope from middle of which a suitable bait is hung for enticing wild birds. Birds like egrets are captured with the help of this trap.

(iv) Pole trap: (Image 4[w]). In this type of trap, 80 to 100 snares that look like hanging flags are placed around a decoy bird. Each snare bar measures 20-24in in length. The lower part of the bar is made up of bamboo; whereas the upper part is made up of cane. Aquatic and semi aquatic birds are captured with the help of this trap.

(v) Bow trap: (Image 5a[w],b[w]). In this kind of trap a snare is tightened to a band from the bamboo. A trigger is placed in such a way that when a bird trips the trigger, it is easily pushed down. Then the trip is automatically released and the snare loop is pulled around the neck of the bird. This trap is also used for capturing of aquatic and semi-aquatic birds. Two distinct designs of bow traps are observed mainly among Rabha community of Chandadubi areas.

(b) Cage trap (Image 6[w]).

Cage traps are used mainly for capturing of aerial birds. A dove (*Streptopelia* spp.) cage trap was observed in Kamalpur area. In this trap a trained decoy dove is placed in a close knitted chamber. Three sides of the chamber are covered with dried fern leaves. A mechanical shutter is placed in front of the uncovered side. There is a loose trigger plate placed in such a way that when a dove steps on this plate, the plate pulls a releasing knot of a trip. Then the mechanical shutter automatically traps the dove.

(c) Net trap (Image 7[w]).

In this kind of trapping a long mist net like structure weaved from fine nylon thread, referred locally as sky net, is used over the bird feeding areas. The mesh size is 1.5in. The length is about 70ft and the breadth is about 12ft. Huge numbers of birds are captured with the help of this trap. Sky nets are used in Kalitapara and in Kurua areas of this district.

[w] See Images in the web supplement at www.zoosprint.org

Table 1. Season for different bird trapping in Kamrup district of Assam

Birds trapped	Trap used	Season for trapping
Water cock (*Kora*)	Pole trap	April - June
Purple Moorhen (*Kaim charai*)	Pole trap	April - June
Egret (*Baguli*)	Closed dome-shaped trap	All seasons
Heron (*Kona moochree*)	Closed dome-shaped trap	All seasons
Whistling Teal (*Horali*)	Pole trap	June - Dec
Water hen (*Dauk*)	Rectangular bar trap	Feb - April
Dove (*Kapao*)	Cage trap	Jan - May
Bulbul (*Bulbuli*)	Open bar trap	Nov - Dec

(d) Gum trap (Image 8[w]).

Plant latex of *Ficus glomerata* (locally *Tenga bar*) and *Ficus bengalensis* (locally *Rangi ahat*) are used in gum trap. The latex is first boiled with mustard oil. Then some fine bamboo sticks are coated with this latex. The sticks are placed at places where birds come for feeding. Birds are lured with suitable bait and birds get stuck to the gum traps by their legs or wings.

Animal trapping requires less time and energy than most other hunting methods. The traditionally used traps are comparatively simple and low cost. However, there is paucity of literature on this traditional skill (Giles, 1981; Daniel, 1983). In the present study, the use of decoy bird is significant. The skill of training the bird for use as decoy was found in Kamalpur area of Kamrup district only. The gum trap is used by Karbi community and Tea tribes (Tasa, 1986; Kurmi, 1993). Capturing of birds for sport is unique in Hajo area only. Birds in other areas are captured for food and "medicinal" purposes. In normal capturing skill bird trapping is subjected to a destructive practice. Such destructive trapping can be adapted for conservation purposes through planned actions only after the need and methods are identified. The traps may also be useful in doing certain research works in the field of experimental domestication and in vermicontrol.

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