



Snakes of Telangana: An Annotated Checklist with New Locality Records and Notes on Natural History

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India’s youngest state, Telangana, was carved out of the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh in 2014. The first herpetofaunal record from Telangana was a pictorial description by Sir Patrick Russell (1796) of the Common Bronze-backed Treesnake (*Dendrelaphis tristis*) (as a “Goobra”) from Hyderabad. A number of subsequent publications (Kinnear 1913; Sharma 1971; Sanyal et al. 1993; Rao et al. 2005; Srinivasulu 2005; Srinivasulu and Das 2008; Srinivasulu et al. 2009; Ganesh et al. 2013; Visvanathan 2015; Dandge and Tiple 2016; Prakash 2016; Visvanathan et al. 2017; Kumar et al. 2017; Sailu et al. 2017; Anne and Visvanathan 2018; Narayana et al. 2018; Seetharamaraju et al. 2019; Hussain et al. 2020; Narayana and Sandeep 2021; Choure et al. 2021) have contributed to documenting the ophidian diversity of this region. Nevertheless, despite the spurt of new species records in the recent past, snake diversity and distribution in Telangana remain poorly known.

Collating data from snake rescues, visual encounter surveys, and other opportunistic records collected by the Friends of Snakes Society between 1995 and 2020, we herein present an annotated checklist of the snakes of Telangana, reporting 41 species in 11 families, the distribution of these species, and new locality records.

Methods

Telangana (Fig. 1), situated at 15°50'N to 19°55'N and 77°14'E to 81°19'E, covers over 112,077 km², of which 20,582.31 km² (i.e., 18.36%) is covered by forests. This region predominantly experiences a subtropical climate with dry deciduous vegetation. Annual rainfall is 1,100–1,200 mm and temperature varies from 15 to 45 °C (FSI 2019).

The Friends of Snakes Society is a non-governmental organization (NGO) working for snake conservation since 1995. The organization has been carrying out a snake rescue-relocation program to mitigate human-wildlife conflict, where imperiled snakes are safely captured and relocated to viable habitats. For each snake rescued, details of the caller, date and

time of the rescue, location address, and species rescued are documented. We utilized the data from snake rescues and field encounters to collate the checklist and classify the species into five categories of perceived abundance (very common, common, uncommon, rare, and very rare). Further, we included data from opportunistic visual-encounter and random road-mortality surveys. We used various field guides, online data-

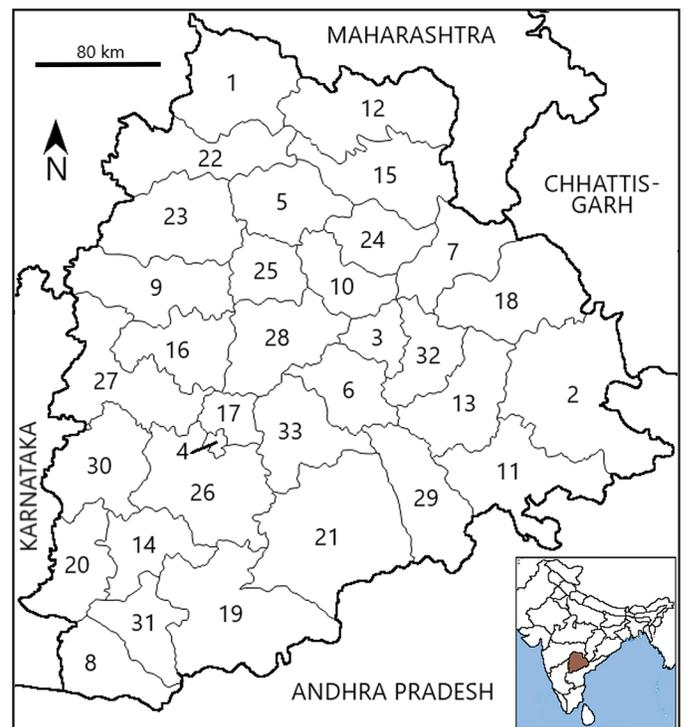


Fig. 1. Districts of Telangana, India. 1. Adilabad, 2. Bhadradi Kothagudem, 3. Hanamkonda, 4. Hyderabad, 5. Jagtial, 6. Jangaon, 7. Jayashankar Bhupalapally, 8. Jogulamba Gadwal, 9. Kamareddy, 10. Karimnagar, 11. Khammam, 12. Kumarambheem Asifabad, 13. Mahabubabad, 14. Mahabubnagar, 15. Mancherial, 16. Medak, 17. Medchal–Malkajgiri, 18. Mulugu, 19. Nagarkurnool, 20. Narayanpet, 21. Nalgonda, 22. Nirmal, 23. Nizamabad, 24. Peddapalli, 25. Rajanna Sircilla, 26. Ranga Reddy, 27. Sangareddy, 28. Siddipet, 29. Suryapet, 30. Vikarabad, 31. Wanaparthy, 32. Warangal, 33. Yadadri Bhuvanagiri.

bases, and relevant literature (Smith 1943; Whitaker and Captain 2004; Uetz 2021) to identify the species.

Results and Discussion

Several of the records of 41 species in 11 families recorded during rescues or surveys (Table 1) are noteworthy. Photographic vouchers of new records (see below) were deposited in the Milwaukee Public Museum (MPM). Voucher numbers are provided in the text and figure captions. The identities of those species were confirmed from photographs by Dr. Karthikeyan Vasudevan, Scientist In-charge, Laboratory for the Conservation of Endangered Species (LaCONES), Hyderabad, India.

A live Elliot's Shieldtail (*Uropeltis ellioti*) encountered by forest officials in the Gundem area of the Domalapenta Range of Nagarkurnool District in February 2021 (B. Sadasivaiah, pers. comm.) was photographed and released into suitable habitat.

On 20 July 2016, a road-killed Yellow-green Catsnake (*Boiga flaviviridis*) (Fig. 2A; MPM VZP 1045) was photographed near Eegalapenta in the Amrabad Tiger Reserve of Nagarkurnool District (16°10'31.5"N, 78°52'04.9"E). Numerous Forsten's Catsnakes (*Boiga forsteni*), which have

a more extensive distribution in the state than *B. flaviviridis*, were recorded during nocturnal road surveys in the Amrabad Tiger Reserve (Nagarkurnool District) (Fig. 2B; MPM VZP 1046), Pakhal (Warangal District), Eturnagaram Wildlife Sanctuary (Jayashankar Bhupalapally District), and Mahabubnagar and Bhadradi Kothagudem Districts. On 22 November 2021, an adult *B. forsteni* was rescued from Teacher's Colony, Mandamarri, Mancheri District (18°59'15.3"N, 79°28'56.0"E). All of the snakes we encountered were grayish morphs (i.e., we found no orangish-brown morphs). The elusive, obligatory oophagus Indian Egg-eater (*Boiga westermanni*) had been reported from Sangareddy, Sangareddy District (Visvanathan 2015) and Bellampalli, Mancheri District (Dandge and Tiple 2016). On 10 July 2016, we recorded a roadkilled *B. westermanni* (Fig. 2C; MPM VZP 1047) from Chevella, Rangareddy District (17°18'38.7"N, 78°10'42.2"E).

On 15 June 2018, we encountered a live Indian Smooth Snake (*Coronella brachyura*) in undergrowth adjacent to a body of water near Moinabad, Rangareddy District. At 2115 h on 23 July 2019, an adult *C. brachyura* was killed when it strayed into a human dwelling in Belgaon Village, Adilabad District (Fig. 2D; MPM VZP 1048).

Table 1. An annotated checklist of the snakes of Telangana. Abbreviations: very common (VC), common (C), uncommon (UC), rare (R), and very rare (VR).

Species (abundance)	Distribution (sources)
Typhlopidae	
Beaked Wormsnake (<i>Grypotyphlops acutus</i>) (UC)	All districts of Telangana (this study)
Brahminy Blindsnake (<i>Indotyphlops braminus</i>) (VC)	All districts of Telangana (this study)
Uropeltidae	
Elliot's Shieldtail (<i>Uropeltis ellioti</i>) (VR)	Nagarkurnool (Sadasivaiah, pers. comm.)
Pythonidae	
Indian Rock Python (<i>Python molurus</i>) (R)	All districts of Telangana (this study)
Erycidae	
Common Sandboa (<i>Eryx conicus</i>) (C)	All districts of Telangana (this study)
Red Sandboa (<i>Eryx johnii</i>) (UC)	All districts of Telangana (this study)
Colubridae	
Long-nosed Vinesnake (<i>Ahaetulla oxyrhyncha</i>) (UC)	All districts of Telangana (this study)
Common Bronze-backed Treesnake (<i>Dendrelaphis tristis</i>) (C)	All districts of Telangana (this study)
Yellow-green Catsnake (<i>Boiga flaviviridis</i>) (VR)	Jangaon (Choure et al. 2021); Nagarkurnool (this study)
Forsten's Catsnake (<i>Boiga forsteni</i>) (VR)	Nagarkurnool, Warangal, Jayashankar Bhupalapally, Mancheri, Mahabubnagar and Bhadradi Kothagudem (this study)
Common Catsnake (<i>Boiga trigonata</i>) (UC)	All districts of Telangana (this study)

(continued)

Species (abundance)	Distribution (sources)
Indian Egg-eater (<i>Boiga westermanni</i>) (VR)	Mancherial (Dandge and Tiple 2016); Sangareddy (Visvanathan 2015); Rangareddy (this study)
Indian Smooth Snake (<i>Coronella brachyura</i>) (VR)	Rangareddy and Adilabad (this study)
Common Trinket Snake (<i>Coelognathus belena</i>)	All districts of Telangana (this study)
Arrow-headed Trinket Snake (<i>Coelognathus belena nigriangularis</i>) (VR)	Nagarkurnool (this study)
Common Bridal Snake (<i>Dryocalamus nympha</i>) (R)	All districts of Telangana (this study)
Common Wolfsnake (<i>Lycodon aulicus</i>) (VR)	Medchal-Malkajgiri, Mahabubnagar, and Nagarkurnool (this study)
Russell's Wolfsnake (<i>Lycodon fasciolatus</i>) (C)	All districts of Telangana (this study)
Yellow-collared Wolfsnake (<i>Lycodon flavicollis</i>) (UC)	All districts of Telangana (this study)
Yellow-spotted Wolfsnake (<i>Lycodon flavomaculatus</i>) (VR)	Adilabad (Anne and Visvanathan 2018)
Barred Wolfsnake (<i>Lycodon striatus</i>) (UC)	All districts of Telangana (this study)
Banded Kukri (<i>Oligodon arnensis</i>) (C)	All districts of Telangana (this study)
Streaked Kukri (<i>Oligodon taeniolatus</i>) (UC)	All districts of Telangana (this study)
Nagarjunsagar Racer (<i>Platyceps bholanathi</i>) (R)	Nalgonda (Ganesh et al. 2013); Mahabubnagar, Medak, Medchal-Malkajgiri, Hyderabad, Sangareddy, and Rangareddy (this study)
Banded Racer (<i>Platyceps plinii</i>) (C)	All districts of Telangana (this study)
Oriental Ratsnake (<i>Ptyas mucosa</i>) (VC)	All districts of Telangana (this study)
Natricidae	
Buff-striped Keelback (<i>Amphiesma stolidum</i>) (UC)	All districts of Telangana (this study)
Olive Keelback (<i>Atrretium schistosum</i>) (R)	All districts of Telangana (this study)
Checkered Keelback (<i>Fowlea piscator</i>) (VC)	All districts of Telangana (this study)
Green Keelback (<i>Rhabdophis plumbicolor</i>) (R)	Nagarkurnool (Rao et al. 2005); all districts of Telangana (this study)
Sibynophiidae	
Dumeril's Black-headed Snake (<i>Sibynophis subpunctatus</i>) (R)	All districts of Telangana (this study)
Psammophiidae	
Condanus Sandsnake (<i>Psammophis condanarus</i>) (VR)	Yadadri Bhuvanagiri (B. Sadasivaiah, pers. comm.)
Stout Sandsnake (<i>Psammophis longifrons</i>) (VR)	Medchal-Malkajgiri (Visvanathan et al. 2017); Nagarkurnool and Wanaparthy (B. Sadasivaiah, pers. comm.); Rangareddy and Mancherial (this study)
Homalopsidae	
Smooth Watersnake (<i>Enhydryis enhydryis</i>) (VR)	Nagarkurnool (Rao et al. 2005)
Dog-faced Watersnake (<i>Cerberus rynchops</i>) (VR)	Suryapet (Sanyal 1993) (see also text)
Elapidae	
Banded Krait (<i>Bungarus fasciatus</i>) (VR)	Warangal (Kinnear 1913); Jayashankar Bhupalpally (Prakash 2016; Sreenivasulu et al. 2009)
Common Krait (<i>Bungarus caeruleus</i>) (UC)	All district of Telangana (this study)
Slender Coralsnake (<i>Calliophis melanurus</i>) (VR)	Nalgonda (Sharma 1971); Nalgonda (Seetharamaraju et al. 2019); Nagarkurnool and Nalgonda (this study)
Spectacled Cobra (<i>Naja naja</i>) (VC)	All districts of Telangana (this study)
Viperidae	
Common Bamboo Pitviper (<i>Craspedocephalus gramineus</i>) (R)	Mahabubnagar, Nagarkurnool, and Mancherial (this study)
Russel's Viper (<i>Daboia russelii</i>) (VC)	All districts of Telangana (this study)
Saw-scaled Viper (<i>Echis carinatus</i>) (R)	All districts of Telangana (this study)



Fig. 2. New locality records for snakes in Telangana, India: (A) Roadkilled Yellow-green Catsnake (*Boiga flaviviridis*) (MPM VZP 1045) from Nagarkurnool District; (B) roadkilled Forsten's Catsnake (*Boiga forsteni*) (MPM VZP 1046) from Nagarkurnool District; (C) roadkilled Indian Egg-eater (*Boiga westermanni*) (MPM VZP 1047) from Rangareddy District; (D) dead Indian Smooth Snake (*Coronella brachyura*) (MPM VZP 1048) from Adilabad District. Photographs by Aditya Kesav (A), Avinash Visvanathan (B), Arun Kumar (C), and Sreyash Sarpatwar (D).

At 0900 h on 8 October 2011, we encountered a live Arrow-headed Trinket Snake (*Coelognathus helena nigriangularis*) (Fig. 3A; MPM VZP 1049) on a slope adjacent to the base of Mallelatheertham Waterfall in Mallelatheertham, Nagarkurnool District (16°15'58.5"N, 78°51'22.6"E). On 4 September 2017, we photographed a road-killed *C. h. nigriangularis* (Fig. 3B; MPM VZP 1050) near Domalapenta, Nagarkurnool District.

Common Wolfsnakes (*Lycodon aulicus*) are relatively rare in the state, with only five records (two from Medchal-Malkajgiri, two from Nagarkurnool, and one from Mahabubnagar Districts). On the other hand, Russell's Wolfsnakes (*L. fasciolatus*), Yellow-collared Wolfsnakes (*L. flavicollis*), and Barred Wolfsnakes (*L. striatus*) have been recorded from all districts of the state.

The Nagarjunsagar Racer (*Platyceps bholanathi*) is frequently encountered within its range. Between 2013 and 2022, we recorded 51 individuals from Medak, Sangareddy, Rangareddy, Medchal-Malkajgiri, Hyderabad, Nalgonda, and Mahabubnagar Districts.

A single road-killed Condanarus Sandsnake (*Psammophis condanarus*) was reported in the state in 2020 from Allapur, Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District (Kummari Swamy, pers. comm.), whereas four Stout Sandsnakes (*Psammophis longifrons*) have been recorded, two from Medchal-Malkajgiri District (Visvanathan et. al. 2017) and one each from Nagarkurnool and Wanaparthy Districts (B. Sadasivaiah, pers. comm.). On 12 September 2016, an adult *P. longifrons* was found dead at Aga Khan Academy, Maheswaram, Rangareddy District (17°15'04.3"N, 78°28'59.3"E) and a road-killed *P. longifrons* was documented from Chunnam Batti Wada Village, Mancheril District (18°51'51.7"N, 79°27'27.0"E). The relatively few records of this species in the state are widely scattered, which is suggestive of a relatively wide range.

Sanyal et al. (1993) reported the collection of a Dog-faced Watersnake (*Cerberus rynchops*) in 1963 from Madhavram Village, Munagala Mandal of Suryapet (erstwhile Nalgonda) District. This piscivorous species is restricted to coastal areas of southern Asia, where it inhabits brackish estuarine and



Fig. 3. New locality records for snakes in Telangana, India: (A) Arrow-headed Trinket Snake (*Coelognathus helena nigriangularis*) (MPM VZP 1049) from Mallelatheertham, Nagarkurnool District; (B) roadkilled Arrow-headed Trinket Snake (*Coelognathus helena nigriangularis*) (MPM VZP 1050) from Domalapenta, Nagarkurnool District; (C) subadult Golden Flying Snake (*Chrysopelea ornata*) (MPM VZP 1051) rescued in Hyderabad; (D) roadkilled Bamboo Pitviper (*Craspedocephalus gramineus*) (MPM VZP 1052) from Nagarkurnool District. Photographs by Aditya Kesav (A & B), Avinash Visvanathan (C), and Sandeep Anne (D).

marine coastal environments. This unusual record is ~150 km from the known range and warrants further investigation.

At 1400 h on 14 July 2017, we rescued an unsexed Golden Flying Snake (*Chrysopelea ornata*) (total length 702 mm) from a timber depot in Hyderabad (Fig. 3C; MPM VZP 1051). Because this is outside the species' known distribution, we believe that this snake might have been transported into the state with timber originating in Chhattisgarh or Odisha. Because it is not considered native to the state, we omitted it from Table 1.

Multiple Slender Coralsnakes (*Calliophis melanurus*) have been recorded from Nalgonda District (Sharma 1971; Seetharamaraju et al. 2019) and from Nidigonda, Hanamkonda District (Sadasivaiah, pers. comm.). On 11 September 2019, we recorded an adult *C. melanurus* from Mannanur, Nagarkurnool District (Gajjala Babu Reddy, pers. comm.), and another individual was rescued from Bondangiparty Village, Chandur Mandal, Nalgonda District (17°01'54.0"N, 79°02'50.7"E).

Sailu et al. (2017) reported the Common Bamboo Pitviper (*Craspedocephalus gramineus*) from Ameenpur Lake, Medak District, without providing any particulars. Due to the lack of a voucher and absence of earlier reports from this region, despite being a well-studied area, we consider this record to be dubious. However, we recorded *C. gramineus* from Nagarkurnool, Mahabubnagar, and Mancherial Districts based on field surveys and roadkills (Fig. 3D; MPM VZP 1052). Based on the number of roadkills we encountered, this species appears to be relatively common within its known range.

Natural History Notes.—Snake rescues and short-term captive care can yield significant insights into various aspects of a species' natural history, including habitat preferences, dietary choices, aposematic responses, and breeding cycles.

Despite our best efforts to relocate gravid snakes to suitable habitats, on several occasions, rescued individuals laid eggs during transit or in their temporary enclosures. Egg

clutches were separated from the parent and incubated using artificial incubators (Zoo Med Reptibators). During incubation, ambient temperatures were maintained at 28–30 °C and relative humidity at 80–90%. Egg deflation (caving in) was addressed by increasing the humidity and fungal molds were treated with antifungal dusting powders. We have successfully incubated eggs of the Indian Rock Python (*Python molurus*), Common Trinket Snake (*Coelognathus helena*), Russell's Wolfsnake (*Lycodon fasciolatus*), Banded Racer (*Platyceps plinii*), Oriental Ratsnake (*Ptyas mucosa*), Checkered Keelback (*Fowlea piscator*), and Spectacled Cobra (*Naja naja*), and released hatchlings into suitable habitat. Eggs laid by *P. molurus* were left undisturbed as the mothers were quite adept in brooding their clutches with high rates of success. To better understand the reproductive biology of these snakes, we documented all pertinent data plus instances of combat between males, mating, egg-laying, and the occurrence of hatchlings during snake rescues (Table 2).

We observed an adult Long-nosed Vinesnake (*Ahaetulla oxyrhyncha*) in Uppal, Hyderabad, feeding on four Gypsy Moth (*Lymantria* sp.) caterpillars, picking one after another from a tree trunk. A 60 cm-long Checkered Keelback (*Fowlea piscator*) consumed an adult Oriental Garden Lizard (*Calotes versicolor*), which was an apparent deviation from the species' regular diet of fishes and frogs (Whitaker and Captain 2004). We encountered a Spectacled Cobra (*Naja naja*) scavenging a

discarded chicken leg at a meat store and numerous occasions of Checkered Keelbacks consuming road-killed anuran carcasses. An adult Red Sandboa (*Eryx johnii*) consumed eggs of domestic Guinea Fowl (*Numida meliagraris*). During snake rescues, we recorded ophiophagy in the Long-nosed Vinesnake (*Ahaetulla oxyrhyncha*), Common Catsnake (*Boiga trigonata*), Common Krait (*Bungarus caeruleus*), and Russell's Viper (*Daboia russelii*) hatchlings, Common Sandboa (*Eryx conicus*), Red Sandboa (*Eryx johnii*), Spectacled Cobra (*Naja naja*), Indian Rock Python (*Python molurus*), and Green Keelback (*Rhabdophis plumbicolor*), and cannibalism in captivity by a Spectacled Cobra and hatchling Russell's Vipers.

Few Russell's Wolfsnakes (*Lycodon fasciolatus*) feigned death (thanatosis) when handled. Multiple Common Catsnakes (*Boiga trigonata*) vibrated their tails, creating a rattling noise in leaf litter. In dramatic bluffing displays (= deimatic behavior), cornered Common Bronze-backed Treesnakes (*Dendrelaphis tristis*) lunged at rescuers during efforts to escape. Wolfsnakes (*Lycodon* spp.), Red Sandboas (*Eryx johnii*), Banded Kukris (*Oligodon arnensis*), and Common Kraits (*Bungarus caeruleus*) generated short bouts of hissing complemented by quick strikes or body jerks.

In captivity, Banded Racers (*Platyceps plinii*) and Checkered Keelbacks (*Fowlea piscator*) frequently burrowed into loose soil and stayed hidden; sometimes, like sandboas (*Eryx* sp.), Checkered Keelbacks excavated tunnels in moist

Table 2. Observations of reproductive biology in snakes from Telangana. Species with live birth are indicated by asterisks (*).

Species	Mating/ Combat	Egg-laying	Hatchlings or Neonates	Additional Observations
<i>Python molurus</i>	Feb	Apr–May	Jul–Aug	To 15 eggs
<i>Eryx conicus</i> *	—	—	May–Jun	To 15 hatchlings
<i>Eryx johnii</i> *	—	—	Apr, July	—
<i>Dendrelaphis tristis</i>	May	Jul–Aug	Sep	To 10 eggs; mating ball (1 female, 6 males)
<i>Boiga trigonata</i>	—	—	Dec	—
<i>Coelognathus helena</i>	Jun–Jul	Aug–Sep	Dec–Jan	5–10 eggs
<i>Platyceps bholanathi</i>	—	—	Jun	—
<i>Platyceps plinii</i>	Nov–Jan	Dec–Feb	Mar–May	To 15 eggs
<i>Lycodon fasciolatus</i>	Oct–Dec	Dec–Feb	Feb–Apr	To 8 eggs
<i>Lycodon striatus</i>	—	—	Dec	—
<i>Oligodon arnensis</i>	Oct	Dec	Feb, May	To 6 eggs
<i>Ptyas mucosa</i>	Jun–Jul	Jul–Sep	Sep–Oct	8–13 eggs; 3 males in combat (Hyderabad, 17 June 2019)
<i>Fowlea piscator</i>	Oct–Nov	Dec–Jan	Mar–Apr, Jun	To 68 eggs
<i>Amphiesma stolatum</i>	Ju–July	Jun–Aug	—	Mating ball (1 female, 3 males)
<i>Bungarus caeruleus</i>	Oct–Nov	—	Mar–May	Male combat (usually 1900–2200 h)
<i>Naja naja</i>	Feb–Mar	Apr–May	Jun–Jul	Males frequently on elevated perches during mating season
<i>Echis carinatus</i>	—	—	Jun–Jul	—
<i>Daboia russelii</i> *	Nov–Jan	—	May–Jun	—

sand and used them as refugia when approached. On numerous occasions during the breeding season, adult Spectacled Cobras (*Naja naja*) of both sexes were rescued from treetops and other raised platforms, suggesting that these individuals were using higher perches to search for mates, especially in urban matrices.

Conclusion

Traditional wildlife sampling methods like line transects or quadrant sampling may be ineffective in understanding snake population dynamics, especially in urban landscapes (Parkin et al. 2021). Occurrence data based on snake rescues, road mortality surveys, and opportunistic encounters, despite varied limitations and biases, can offer insights into species diversity and distribution across large spatial tracts of human-modified landscapes. This study, utilizing snake rescue records and opportunistic visual encounters, dramatically narrowed the knowledge gap of snake diversity and distribution in the state of Telangana. We recommend that similar studies be conducted to better understand snake diversity, ecology, and population trends in urban and modified landscapes across the country.

Acknowledgements

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