



A new pit viper from Pakke Tiger Reserve, Arunachal Pradesh named after Salazar Slytherin from Harry Potter movie

Mumbai, April 17: A team of researchers has discovered a new species of venomous snake in Arunachal Pradesh, named *Trimeresurus salazar*. It was discovered in the thick evergreen forests of the Pakke Tiger Reserve in Arunachal Pradesh during a field expedition by researchers in July 2019. The new species is named after J.K. Rowling's fictional Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry's co-founder, Salazar Slytherin.

“Two specimens of the new species were found in field that helped diagnose the new species,” states the paper published by the researchers — Zeeshan A. Mirza, Harshal Bhonsle, Pushkar Phansalkar, Mandar Sawant, Gaurang Gowande and Harshil Patel — in the international science journal *Zoosystematics and Evolution*. While Zeeshan Mirza is associated with the National Centre for Biological Sciences, Bengaluru; Mr. Harshal & Mr. Mandar with the Bombay Natural History Society, Mumbai; Mr. Gowande is associated with Pune's Fergusson College and Pushkar is associated with the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun. Shripad Halbe of the Brihad Bharatiya Sam-aj and the Singinawa Conservation Foundation funded the study.

The new species belongs to the group of green pit vipers from which it differs from its closely related species in bearing a rusty red or orange lateral stripe along the head and the entire body. Comparison of DNA sequences and skull morphology of closely related species highlight the distinctness of the new species.

The authors are happy about discovering a new species of pit viper but worried at the same time, as the proposed 49-km Seijosa-Balukpong road will cut through the habitat of the new species. Roads take a heavy toll of life and data from various studies have highlighted high mortality of snakes due to vehicular movement. Researchers behind the discovery, who covered large tracts of forested land in northeast India, said that they have documented more species from the forests of Arunachal Pradesh, which is likely to yield new species. Work is underway to describe them.

Underlining that forests across northeast India have not been well-explored for their biodiversity, especially reptiles, amphibians and most invertebrate groups, the authors have said that “anthropogenic pressures like road widening, construction of dams and hydropower plants threaten the forest and biodiversity across Arunachal Pradesh”. It is hoped that the government can consider alternate plans rather than fragmenting one of the most biodiverse habitats across northeast India.

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