

Snakebite treatment in rural areas

Lissemys in Andamans

Dr. A K Das, Officer-in-Charge of the Zoological Survey of India in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands writes that the soft-shell found in the Andamans has been identified as Lissemys punctata granosa. He adds that a specimen of Naja naja kaouthia was collected from a village near Port Blair.

Snake Service

The Snake Park's snake catching service for Madras is flourishing. In 1980 we had 94 'SNAKE' calls from terrified residents and removed 33 snakes from houses and gardens. In 1981 there were 119 calls and 45 snakes were caught and brought to the park.

Freshwater turtles

While sea turtles have received a fair amount of attention in recent years in India freshwater turtles have largely been ignored except when in a curry. The Wildlife Act of 1972 lists only the species which are all commercially used but by no means near as rare and unknown as for instance, Heosemys silvatica or Kachuga kachuga.

The Wildlife Act listing for Schedule I (Part II) includes these freshwater turtles: Trionyx gangeticus, Lissemys punctata, Kachuga teeta and Trionyx hurum. Melanochelys tricarinata and all Testudinidae and Trionychidae are listed in Schedule IV. Batagur which may be extinct or Geoclemys, Cyclemys among other rare species are not protected.

In the north, freshwater turtles mostly Trionyx gangeticus and Chitra indica are extensively used for meat and thousands turn up in, for instance, the 20 or so markets around Calcutta. In November-December, at low water the prices drop from Rs.18/- to Rs.5/- per kg; turtle meat is then cheaper even than beef. Hunting devices include hooks and using a long pole with a nail at one end to jab river beds. Nets are also used. In the Sunderbans, local fishermen described Batagur baska and said these were occasionally caught in offshore nets during November-December.

Freshwater turtles are an important food resource and as cheap and readily available protein for poor people are an excellent proposition. But there is a need to investigate the current large-scale usage. From all accounts numbers brought into markets decrease year by year; it is obvious that the industry must be regulated and limited to a reasonable number.

Perhaps easily reared species such as Lissemys can be commercially farmed? The long incubation period would try one's patience but the rewards would compensate.