**FIRST SIGHTING AND OCCURANCE RECORD OF KING COBRA (*OPHIOPHAGUS HANNAH*) IN AZAD KASHMIR THE TERRITORY OF (PAKISTAN)**

ABU UL HASSAN FAIZ 1,2,4, FAKHAR-I-ABBAS 2,1, MIKHAIL F. BAGATUROV 3, LARIAB ZAHRA 1 and TANVEER AKHTAR

1Women University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (Bagh)

2Bio Resource Research Centre (BRC), 34-Bazar Road, G-6/4, Islamabad, Pakistan

3Zoological Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg, 199034, Russia; Athens Institute for Education and Research, Athena. Greece.

4Corresponding author: e-mail: [sabulhussan@gmail.com](mailto:sabulhussan@gmail.com), +92,03349768419

**Abstract.** During the herpetofauna research in Bagh area (central part of State of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Azad Kashmir, Pakistan) surveyed from February 2015 to September 2016, we sighted and recorded elusive species, king cobra (*Ophiophagus hannah*) by using the visual encounter method. The species was crossing road from southern latitude 500 m to 1367 m in the northern parts across river Mahal (33°57'39.15"N 73°47'42.66"E). The species is rear, vulnerable in (IUCN) listed in CITES Appendix II (Stuart, B , 2012). The documented distribution range of endemic King Cobra is East Asia and Southeast Asia, but was unrecorded in Western Himalayas (Pir Punjal range) of Kashmir (Pakistan).These findings are new distribution records for the species and addition in checklist of ophidian fauna both, for the Azad Kashmir area and Pakistan.

**Introduction**

The king cobra is the world's longest venomous snake, of the family Elapidae with unique coloration, scalation and body size. The king cobra inhabits in a variety of habitats such as. tropical, subtropical degraded forests, high altitude grassland, lowlands, swamps ,agricultural areas near human vicinity, marshes, and open scrubland ( Mehrtens, J. 1987). The geographic distribution range of king cobra is South and Southeast Asia but in Pakistan there was no previous record of population (Francis. 2011), nor reported in recent studies in herpetofauna of Azad Kashmir such as ( Faiz, 2016).The recorded altitudinal distribution of the species is in the range from 150 m to 2128m asl (Waltner, R.G. 1975).

**MATERIAL AND METHODS**

We were conducting study on serpentine diversity in rural areas of district Bagh (azad Kashmir) by visual encounter methods by following (Heyer et al 1994).On 15 may 2017 at 11.10 h AM, adult specimen of king cobra was recorded at numanpura (district bagh) and was moving from dense vegetation to river Mahal by crossing Bagh highway. We observed and photographed the specimen. The site was marked with GPS (Garminarco4,2). The major type of vegetation of the area were also recorded for habitat analysis.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The snake was found at day, crossing a road adjacent to diverse topographic area (hill slopes and plain hill tops having grasslands, and ravines with different degree of moisture conditions) and moisture conditions (deeper ravines with thick forested vegetation cover, hardly receiving the sun light, to open mountain ridges).The major type of vegetation is Abies pindrow (Partal or silver fir) and *Pinus wallichiana* (Biar or blue pine) and *P. roxbeghii (Chir)* have wider distribution. *Eriobotrya japonica (louquat), ), Prunus armeniaca (Hari or apricot), P. domestica (plum) and P. persica (peach), Quercus baloot, Q. dilatata, Acer pentapomicum and Aesculus indica,* and Among the shrubs *Viburnum, Sarcoccoca, Indigofera, Rubus, Berberis and Skimmia*.

The local people report pair of snake (king cobra) are often seen in this territory.The area presents a typical Himalayan moist temperate character and similar like vegetation of Tolipir National Park (Faizet.al.2014).The area is under huge anthropogenic pressure (Faiz et.al 2015) so, there is urgent n need for population density-based research, so as to expand our knowledge of the serpentine diversity and conservation measure of the area. 

**Fig 1.Map and study area of king cobra**

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