

Home » Animal lover Jamie finds and rescues rare snake species in Bhutan

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## Animal lover Jamie finds and rescues rare snake species in Bhutan

By Minjur Dorji | 03 May 2013

**The particular species is known to be the first ever of its kind recorded in Bhutan, and the eighth across the world**

To add to the country's already rich biodiversity where infinite flora and fauna are being discovered and named every week or the other, Dinodon gammiei, a rare snake species has just joined the list of uncovered wildlife populace in Bhutan.

The snake would also be the youngest, based on size of data collected.



Trashigang Dzongkhag Forest Officer and Herpetologist, Jigme Tshelthrim Wangyal said "It is a new record for the country, meaning this species was never seen or reported from Bhutan in the past. So, definitely the species adds to the diversity value of the country. It's exciting to know that we also have such a rare snake species in the country."

Jamie Vaughan, an American woman, a lover of all animals spotted the snake in one of her dog house at her private stray animal shelter in Paro.

Dinodon gammiei, found in Bhutan. Photo courtesy: Jamie Vaughan  
Dinodon gammiei, of the Colubridae family, popularly known by its common name 'The Sikkim False Wolf Snake' or 'Gammie's false wolf snake' was first described by Blanford in 1878 from four specimens collected from Cinchona plantations near Darjeeling in Sikkim, eastern Himalaya, India.

Jamie told The Bhutanese that the snake probably came from the nearby forest and water/irrigation canal a couple meters from the dog house where he was found. "I realized the staff had started to clean the dog house and the snake has been exposed to water and strong cleaning chemicals on the floor which could kill it," she said.

"My first reaction was 'wow', he's gorgeous and the next reaction was to return him to the wild," Jamie said.

She said the snake wouldn't move after she took it out in the open.

"So I realized the cleaning chemicals were definitely negatively impacting him and he needed further rehabilitation if he were going to survive. Then I decided to take him inside in order to properly rinse him and stabilize him in a safe warm environment. I could not leave him defenseless outside as he would have been a sitting duck for predators," she said.

With her wildlife rehabilitation studies knowledge, Jamie nursed the snake for four nights and five days until she released it into the wild on 24 April, last week. "I first rinsed him thoroughly with clean water to hopefully eliminate as much of the cleaning residue from him as possible and built him a makeshift terrarium out of an old water filter with sand, soil, water and stones from outside in hopes to best duplicate his natural environment, and followed immediately with hot water bag placed under it to generate heat. Later I made a heat lamp for during the day, but this was only after it became obvious he needed to stay a few days longer," she said.

"Because of his striking resemblance to both the yellow-banded and multi-banded krait which are a very venomous species of snake which is not common here at all I needed to make sure and decided it was important to positively identify it to make sure the public was aware if indeed he in fact was poisonous as he was found right next to the community walking path/irrigation which villagers will soon be walking at all hours of the night for field irrigation below and to find a suitable place for release."

Jamie consulted the Wildlife Conservation Division (WCD) for advice and help with the identification. She was put through to Jigme Tshelthrim Wangyal.

Soon after the snake began showing reasonable nocturnal activity, necessary data were collected for species ID and photos taken with help from WCD and Department of Forests (DoF), Paro. "After getting all sorted, I released him into a safe environment just before nightfall, which is when snakes are typically more active since they are nocturnal creatures," Jamie said.

Snakes in Bhutan are usually killed by farmers as and when spotted in homes, fields or along footpaths and roads. Some have superstitious beliefs that the same snake would return to take human lives if spared.

Jigme Tshelthrim Wangyal said "we must tell the people not to kill the snake since it is a non-venomous breed and a rare species – rare, because it is found only in few pockets of north-eastern Indian states of West Bengal (Darjeeling), Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh."

Jamie said it was vital to note that such discovery strengthens Bhutan's biodiversity reputation but cannot be sustained if the general consensus or behavior is to kill on-site as it seems to be.

"I don't advocate for people to handle or interact with them, just hope that they leave them alone and give them the opportunity to get away. Most are not poisonous or harmful in any way to humans, livestock, or other domestic animals so there is no need to be afraid of them," she said.

Jamie, in her early thirties who has spent years of her life dedicated to ease the sufferings of the many stray animals which end up run-down by vehicles, or just exposed to the cruel elements which devour them in the most horrid manners work tirelessly for the survival of all the resident animals despite acute financial constraints.

She has altruistically taken up the self-chosen duty to care and share for two hundred animals in a shelter in Lango, Paro which is almost a five years old facility. She moved to Paro in 2006.

While many are non-venomous, the only venomous snakes found in Bhutan are Cobras (King cobra, Monocellate cobra and Spectacled cobra), Kraits (Eastern Himalayan Krait, Black Krait and Banded Krait) and Vipers which are known by its prominent V-shaped head.

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