



Sightings of Burmese Pythons (*Python bivittatus*) in and around the Valmiki Tiger Reserve, Bihar, India

Shariq Shafi¹, Abhishek², Kamlesh K. Maurya¹, Gaurav Ojha³, Ambarish Mall³, and Hemkant Roy³

¹WWF-India, 172 B, Lodhi Estate, New Delhi-110003, India (shariq4920.ss@gmail.com)

²TRAFFIC-India, 172-B, Lodhi Estate, New Delhi-110003, India

³Valmiki Tiger Reserve, West Champaran, Bihar-845438, India

In nature, Burmese Pythons (*Python bivittatus*) attain lengths to 6 m, with an average size of about 3.5 m (GISD 2015). These mostly nocturnally active generalist predators are sometimes described as being semiaquatic due to the fact that they are usually found near sources of water, where they feed on

mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians (Stuart et al. 2012). The native range includes India, Nepal, Bangladesh, southern China (including Hong Kong and Hainan), Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, northern Malaysia, and Indonesia, where they occur in marshes, swamps, grasslands,

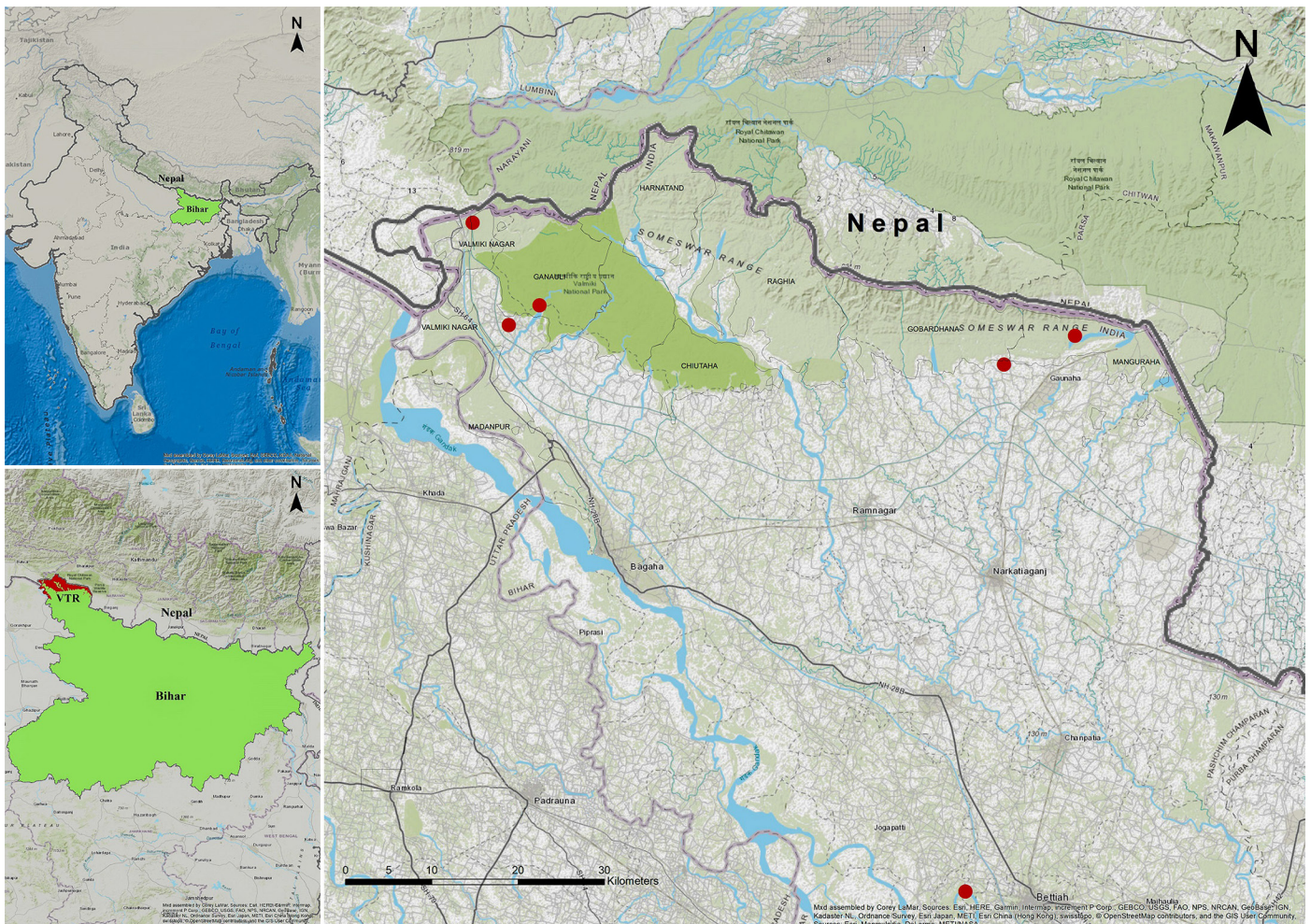


Fig. 1. Map showing the location of the Valmiki Tiger Reserve in Bihar, India. Red dots mark localities where Burmese Pythons (*Python bivittatus*) were observed.

woodlands, mangroves, coastal plains, rain forests, and rocky foothills (O'Shea 1998; Barker and Barker 2008, 2010). The species is listed as vulnerable (VU) on the IUCN Red List (Stuart et al. 2012), with habitat loss and poaching for meat, skins, traditional medicine, and the international trade in live animals as major threats.

In India, the species has been reported from Corbett and Rajaji National Parks, Uttarakhand (Bhupathy 1995; Nawab and Srivastava 2008; Joshi and Singh 2015); the Bhitarkanika Wildlife Sanctuary, Orissa, south of Kolkata, and northeast along the Brahmaputra River (Barker and Barker 2008); and the Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary and Sumera Block of Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh (Yadav et al. 2017; Rashid and Khan 2018).

In 2017 and 2018, we sighted seven Burmese Pythons in and around the Valmiki Tiger Reserve (VTR) in West Champaran District of Bihar, India (27°10'–27°30'N, 83°49'–84°10'E) (Fig. 1). With an area of 901 km², the VTR is located in the Himalayan foothills in the vicinity of the Gandak River. The first observation was made during a routine patrol by frontline staff on 11 March 2017 in the Manguraha Range (27°19'43.8"N, 84°32'55.5"E). A second individual was observed on 11 August 2017 in Narainapur Village (27°20'19.3"N, 83°57'33.1"E) and a third (Fig. 2) on 14 August 2017 near the Manor River in the Ganauli Range (27°21'25.1"N, 83°59'28.0"E). On 4 November 2017, an adult (Fig. 3) was rescued from near Gate No. 2, Gandak Barrage (27°25'59.8"N, 83°55'17.8"E) and released into the nearby forest of the Valmiki Nagar Range. Two individuals were rescued on 14 January 2018 from villages near the Udaipur Wildlife Sanctuary, Bettiah (70 km S of the Valmiki Tiger Reserve) (26°48'49.4"N & 84°26'05.1"E). The staff of the Udaipur Wildlife Sanctuary stated that in a period of 2–3 months, seven other pythons (probably *P. bivittatus*) had been rescued from nearby villages. A final individual (Fig. 4)



Fig. 2. A Burmese Python (*Python bivittatus*) sighted on 14 August 2017 in the Manor River in the Ganauli Range of the Valmiki Tiger Reserve in Bihar, India. Photograph by Abhishek.



Fig. 3. An adult Burmese Python (*Python bivittatus*) rescued on 4 November 2017 from Gandak Barrage of the Valmiki Nagar Range. Photograph by Moulika Arabhi.

was sighted on 24 January 2018 in the Manguraha Range (27°19'8.09"N, 84°28'29.79"E) during deployment of camera traps for estimating tiger population density. All except those rescued in villages were near water. We confirmed the identities of these snakes using descriptions in Smith (1943), O'Shea (1998), and Whitaker and Captain (2004).

These observations of adult Burmese Pythons confirm the presence of the species in and around the VTR, increasing the number of reptilian species reported from the reserve to 29. They also confirm suggestions by Barker and Barker (2008) that unreported populations of Burmese Pythons occur in northern India along the Gandak River to the vicinity of Chitwan in Nepal.

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Fig. 4. An adult Burmese Python (*Python bivittatus*) sighted on 24 January 2018 in the Manguraha Range of the Valmiki Tiger Reserve in Bihar, India. Photograph by Shariq Shafi.

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