Current Status and Distribution of Reptiles of Sindh

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Abstract: In Sindh province, total 103 species of reptiles comprising of 42 Lizards, 45 Snakes, 14 Turtles, 1 species each of Tortoise, Crocodile and Gavial has been recorded. 13 key areas for the reptiles have been identified in Sindh along with three important sites viz. Karachi coast, Deh Akro Wildlife Sanctuary and Nara Wetland Complex. Some reptiles are under threat due to large scale exploitation for skin, medicinal use and as food item. Marine Turtles are threatened mainly due to habitat degradation. The common species include Indian Fringe-toad Lizard, Indian Sand Swimmer, Indian Garden Lizard, Sindh Sand Gecko, Desert Monitor and Saw-scaled Viper. Eight species are threatened and 16 species are of special conservation interest and need to be conserved.

Keywords: Sindh, status, reptiles, threatened species.

INTRODUCTION

According to IUCN (2009), there are now 1,677 reptiles species have been included on the IUCN Red List, with 293 added in 2009. In total, 469 are threatened with extinction and 22 are already Extinct or Extinct in the wild. Pakistan has 179 species of reptilian fauna consisting of turtles, tortoises, crocodile, gavial, lizards and snakes [1].

Some useful data on reptiles of Sindh has been collected by Zoological Survey Department, Sindh Wildlife Department, Department of Zoology, University of Karachi, WWF-Pakistan and Halcrow Pakistan (Private), Limited. Although a lot of research work on the reptiles of Sindh has been done but unfortunately most of it is available in the form of reports and unpublished research material. The notable work on the reptiles of Sindh includes [2-33]. The objective of the present study was to investigate the distribution, and population status of reptiles of Sindh.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Reptiles seem to be very active after dusk during the summer season. Skinks and Lizards are diurnal in activity and seen most active during mid morning. Certain geckos and snakes are active mostly at night. The following techniques have been employed for collection of data regarding the occurrence and distribution of reptiles.

Direct Counting

One-Hour Plot Searching

At each site a one-hour search was carried out to detect as many reptiles as possible within a circular central zone. This consisted of searching approximately 20 ha for exactly one hour and recording the individuals.

Night Observations

Transect Method was applied to record Lizards and Snakes with portable spotlights within each transect of 3 km length.

Turning of Stones and Rocks

Reptiles take shutter or hide themselves under the stones or rocks. In the day time surveys, stones or rotten fallen trees were turned over to record the presence of reptiles.

Evidences of finger or footprints, Faecal pellets, tracks, burrows and tunnels were also collected to record the presence of the various species.

Information was also collected from the local wildlife staff and from the communities of the study areas.

Night surveys were also undertaken on the Karachi Coast to record the occurrence of marine turtles particularly during the peak nesting season during July-November.

Crocodile surveys were undertaken in their prime habitats particularly during the winters in December and January. The classification and names of the species in the present work are based on [21].

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RESULTS

In Pakistan, reptiles are a blend of Palearctic, Indo-Malayan and Ethiopian forms [34]. During the present study total 103 species of reptiles comprising of 41 Lizards, 45 snakes, 14 Turtles, 1 species each of Tortoise, crocodile and Gavial has been recorded in Sindh province. 13 key areas for the reptiles also have been identified. The classification and names of the species in the present work are based on [21].

The representatives of four major groups of living reptiles i.e. Lizards, Snakes, Turtles and Crocodiles are found in Sindh. Thus, the class reptilia is divided into three orders, 22 families and 103 species (Table 1).

Table 1. Groups of Reptiles of Sindh

S. No.	Order	Family	No. of Species
1		Dermochelidae	1
2		Cheloniidae	4
3	Chelonia	Trionynychidae	4
4		Emydidae	4
5		Testudinidae	1
6		Lacertidae	3
7		Gekkonidae	16
8		Scincidae	7
9		Agamidae	9
10		Varanidae	3
11		Uromastycidae	2
12		Chamaeleonidae	1
13	Squamata	Eublepharidae	1
14		Typhlopidae	2
15		Leptotyphlopidae	2
16		Boidae	3
17		Colubridae	21
18		Elapidae	3
19		Viperidae	2
20		Hydrophiidae	12
21	Crocodilia	Crocodylidae	1
22	Crocouilia	Gavialidae	1
TOTAL			103

The group wise composition of the Reptiles of Sindh is as under:

Lizards

41 species are known belonging to seven families' viz. Geckonidae, Agamidae, Lacertidae, Scincidae, Chamaeleonidae, Varanidae and Uromasticidae have been recorded. Flat-tail Gecko (*Teratolepis fasciata*), Fan-toad Gecko (*Ptyodactylus homolepis*), Casque Lizard (*Chamaeleo zeylanicus*), Sindh Dutch Snake (*Enhydris pakistanica*), South Indian Wolf Snake (*Lycodon travancoricus*) and Red bellied Marshy Snake (*Xenochrophis piscator*) are the species restricted to Sindh.

Snakes

28 species belonging to 7 families have been recorded. 12 species of marine snakes have been recorded belonging to the family Hydrophiidae. Five species of poisnous snakes belonging to the families Elapidae and Viperidae, 28 species of non-poisnous snakes belonging to the families Leptotyphlapidae, Typhlopidae, Boidae and Colubridae have been recorded.

Turtles and Tortoises

During the study, five species of marine turtles, 8 species of freshwater turtles and 1 species of tortoise have been recorded. As regards the marine turtles, the Leatherback Turtle, Green, Olive Ridley, Hawksbill and Loggerhead Turtles have been recorded from the Sindh and Balochistan coast. Some beaches of Pakistan are the most important nesting grounds of Green Turtle, Olive Ridley and the Loggerhead.

Crocodile and Gavial

One species of crocodile and 1 species of Gavial has been recorded.

DISCUSSION

During the present study, we have identified 13 important areas for reptiles of Sindh (Table 2). The main sites have been discussed below:

Nara Wetland Complex

Situated in Tehsil Nara, district Khairpur, Sindh. The NWC is a complex of about 200 small, medium and large wetlands; some are seasonal but most are permanent. These wetlands are freshwater to brackish to saline. Stretching from the town of Janji in the north to Jamrao Head in the south, these wetlands lie on either side of Nara Canal.

Table 2. Key Areas of Reptiles in Sindh

Area	Key Species
Karachi Coast	Marine Turtles and sea snakes.
Nara Wetland Complex, district Khairpur	Marsh Crocodile, Fresh-water Turtles, Gavial
Deh Akro II Wildlife Sacnctuary, distrit Shaheed Benazirabad	Marsh Crocodile
Nagar Parkar area, district Tharparkar.	Indian Chamaeleon
Chotiari Wetland Complex, district Sanghar	Marsh Crocodile, Freshwater Turtles
Haleji Lake, Keenjhar Lake and Sujawal area, district Thatta	Freshwater Turtles, Monitor Lizards, Indian Spiny-tailed Lizard, Marsh Crocodile (Haleji) and Snakes.
Kirthar National Park,	Lizards, Snakes
district Karachi, Jamshoro and Dadu districts	
Manghopir area, Karachi	Marsh Crocodile
Indus at Sukkur, Guddu and Sujawal	Freshwater Turtles
Khar Centre (KNP), Karachi	Marsh Crocodile

These wetlands along with their aquatic vegetation, reed beds and woodlands are the habitats for a wide variety of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fishes. Hog Deer, Smooth-coated Otter, Marbled Teal, Fishing Cat and Marsh Crocodile are the key species of the area [35].

The following wetlands are important for supporting Marsh Crocidile: Akhero, Badami, Chhaho, Daysan, Derhan, Dholaho, Ganjo, Harni, Jaari, Kirchan, Nagiopeer, Samabi, Simni, Simno Wahid and Torti Dhands.

Deh Akro-II Wildlife Sanctuary

Located in Shaheed Benazirabad district, it was declared a wildlife sanctuary in 1988 with the main purpose of protecting the Marsh Crocodile and The Marbled Teal. It spreads over an area of 20,500 ha and forms a complex of four major habitats i.e. deserts, wetlands with the Jamrao Canal and associated marshes and the agricultural lands. There are more than 30 dhands in the area. The important dhands include Chugri, Akhanwari, Allahdinowari, Bolahi, Chimb, Chhach,Drigh, Kharorho, Kharo, Khewari, Kharanda, Laila, Loon Khan, Manki, Sanri, Wasoowari. It was declared as a Ramsar site in 2002. Pakistan is known to support a large population of Green Turtles nesting primarily at Hawksbay and Sandspit beaches near Karachi [24, 25]. Green Turtle is the main species that nests on the Pakistani Coast. Nesting of Olive Ridley has rarely been observed. While Head Hawksbill, Leatherbacks and Loggerheads have been found washed away by the waves. Recently, nesting of Loggerheads has been reported from Daran area, Jiwani on the Makran Coast

Other Sites

Some other sites are also important for reptiles such as Chotiari Wetland Complex, Kirthar National Park (Karchat and Khar Centre), Nagar Parkar area, Manghopir area (Karachi), Haleji Lake, Keenjhar Lake, Sujawal area, and Indus at Guddu, Sukkur and Sujawal. The key species of these areas have been outlined.

Fable 3.	Protected	Reptiles	in Sindh
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S. No.	Common name
1	Marsh Crocodile
2	Gavial
3	Monitor Lizards (Bengal Monitor, Desert Monitor, Yellow Monitor).
4	Python
5	Marine Turtles (Green, Olive Ridley, Loggerhead, Hawksbill and Leatherback Turtles).

Status of Reptiles in Sindh

The common species of reptiles in Sindh include; Indian Fringe-toad Lizard, Indian Sand Swimmer, Indian Garden Lizard, Sind Sand Gecko, Indian Spinytailed Lizard, Desert Monitor and Saw Scaled Viper. Eleven species of reptiles cannot be shot, snared or trapped as IUCN Red List, they are totally protected under section 7(i) of the Sindh Wildlife Protection Ordinance 1972 (Table 3). Based on eight species of reptiles are threatened in Sindh (Table 4). Twelve species of reptiles are of special conservation interest (Table 5, Figs. 1-5) and these need to be studied in particular. Six species of reptiles have been recorded to be peculiar/ restricted to Sindh (Table 6). From Sindh, five species of reptiles are included in CITES Appendix 1 (Figs. 6-10), while 6 species have been included in Appendix 2 (Table 7 and 8).

Table 4. Threatened Reptiles of Sindh

S. No.	Species name	Status
1	Gavial	Critically Endangered
2	Green Turtle	Endangered
3	Narrow-head Soft shell Turtle	Endangered
4	Indian Soft shell Turtle	Vulnerable
5	Peacock Soft shell	Vulnerable
6	Crowned River Turtle	Vulnerable
7	Olive Ridley	Vulnerable
8	Marsh Crocodile	Vulnerable

Table 5. Species of Special Concern

S. No.	Species name	
1	Green Turtle	
2	Olive Ridley Turtle	
3	Indian Spiny-tailed Lizard	
4	Indian Monitor	
5	Desert Monitor	
6	Chameleon	
7	Marsh Crocodile	
8	Fat-tailed Gecko	
9	Indian Python	
10	Gavial	
11	Indian Softshell Turtle	
12	Indian Narrow-headed Softshell Turtle	

Table 6. Species of Reptiles peculiar to Sindh

S. No.	Common name	Scientific name
1	Flat-tail Gecko	Teratolepis fasciata
2	Fan-toed Gecko	Ptyodactylus homolepis
3	Casque Lizard	Chamaleo zeylanicus
4	Thin-toed Gecko	Cyrtopodion dehakroense
5	Sindhi Ditch Snake	Enhydris pakistanica
6	South Indian Wolf Snake	Lycodon travancaricus
7	Red-bellied Marshy Snake	Xenocrophis piscator

 Table 7.
 Species of Reptiles Included in Appendix 1 of the CITES

S. No.	Species name
1	Marsh Crocodile
2	Gavial
3	Indian Python
4	Spotted Pond Turtle
5	Indian Roofed Turtle

Table 8. Species of Reptiles Included in Appendix 2 of the CITES

S. No.	Species name
1	Brown River Turtle
2	Dhaman
3	Naja spp
4	Family Boidae (Sand Boas)



Figure 1: Olive ridley turtle.



Figure 2: Desert monitor.



Figure 3: Indian spiny-tailed lizard.

Striped Grass Skink, Common Mole Skink, Orangetail Skink, 3-toed Sand Swimmer and 3-fingered Sandfish are threatened due to capture for medicinal use. Sindh Dwarf Gecko, Sindhi Ditch Snake, Red-bellied Marsh Snake and Red-spotted Diadem Snake are threatened due to disturbance in their restricted habitats.



Figure 4: Chameleon.



Figure 5: Indian narrow-headed softshell turtle.



Figure 6: Marsh crocodile.



Figure 7: Gavial.



Figure 8: Indian Python.



Figure 9: Spotted pond turtle.

Marine turtles are threatened, mainly due to habitat degradation and disturbance. Freshwater Turtles are threatened due to turtle meet trade particularly the soft shell turtles viz. Indian Narrow-headed Softshell Turtle and Peacock Softshell.



Figure 10: Indian roofed turtle.

Monitor Lizards are threatened due to their large scale exploitation for skin trade. Leather of considerable utility and value is produced from Monitor Lizard, *Varanus spp.*, making them as attractive target for hunters. Their large size, the use of open habitat and shallow, conspicuous burrows, have together served to render them particularly vulnerable to persecution. As a result of both hunting and urbanization, some populations of various species have been significantly reduced. Those species with small geographical ranges and most specialized habitat requirement are giving the greatest cause of concern.

Three Monitor species occur in Pakistan. Two of these are widespread; the range of the third is geographically restricted. Unfortunately, this is the species which is the most ardently sought after by the leather dealers. The Bengal Monitor *Varanus bengalensis* is the most widely distributed Monitor in Pakistan, being found in all parts of Sindh where water is permanent. The form in Sindh is *V. b. bengalensis* and is particularly common in Sindh.

The Desert Monitor *Varanus griseus* represented by the subspecies, *V. g. konieczny* and *V. g. caspius* is found over much of the province but is more or less restricted to arid areas with sandy soil.

The third species is the Yellow – headed Monitor *Varanus flavescens.* It geographic range is the most restricted of the three species, being found only in seasonally flooded forests and marshes in the floodplains of Indus.

All three monitors are protected in Sindh. The skins of Indian Monitor are in great demand. As the skin of Desert Monitor is thin relatively easily torn, hence it is not liked by the tanners and manufacturers for export. The skin of Yellow – headed Monitor is also in demand but in very small numbers. Monitor Lizards are little used in Pakistan. A few tribal eat the flash such as Kohli, Bheels, Bagrhi and Thani Jogis; and for medicinal purpose for relief of rheumatic pain. Reproductive organs are used in black magic; skin also used in making drum heads; abdominal fat used as salve for skin infections; oil from the fat used as remedy for hemorrhides; oil is also used as an aphrodisiac lubricant. The most common use is for the leather industry. A small number is used for colleges and universities as museum specimens and for scientific research. The Indian Monitor Lizard is under threat due to their large scale [36].

Two species of Spiny-tailed lizards are found in Pakistan viz. Baloch Spiny tailed Lizard, *Saara asmussi* (Strauch) and Indian Spiny tailed lizard. *Saara hardwickii* Gray Indian Spiny tailed Lizard prefers sparse grassland and flat desert with moderately dense clay soil. In many areas the meat is eaten, and it is often sold in villages and larger towns; many people in India and Pakistan use the oil as folk medicine. As a result, thousands of them are killed each year. These lizards are also captured for use as dissection material for the students in the colleges and universities.

CONSERVATION PRIORITIES

Order Chelonia

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There is an urgent need to halt the habitat degradation for the safeguard of marine turtles. Moreover, the commercial exploitation of freshwater turtles, monitor lizards and Spinay tailed lizards needs to be controlled.

CHECKLIST OF REPTILES OF SINDH

	eraer enerena	
۲	Family Cheloniidae	
1	Caretta caretta	Loggerhead Sea Turtle
2	Chelonia mydas	Green sea turtle
3	Eretmochelys imbricata	Hawksbill Turtle
4	Lepidochelys olivacea	Olive Ridley
>	Family Dermochelyidae	
5	Dermochelys coriacea	Leatherback Sea Turtle
\$	Family Emydidae	
6	Geoclemys hamiltonii	Yellow Spotted Mud Turtle/ Spotted Pond Turtle
7	Hardella thurjii	Common River Turtle/ Crowned River Turtle
8	Kachuga tecta	Indian Sawback Turtle / Indian Roofed Turtle

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9	Kachuga smithii	Brown River Turtle	40	Hemidactylus turcicus	Mediterranean Gecko
۵	Family Testudinidae		41	Teratolepis fasciata	Flat-tail Gecko
10	Geochelone elegans	Star Tortoise	42	Tropiocolotes persicus	Sindh Dwarf Gecko
۵	Family Trionychidae		43	Ptyodactylus homolepis	Fan-toed Gecko
11	Aspideretes gangeticus	Indian Softshell Turtle	۵	Family Lacertidae	
12	Aspideretes hurum	Peacock Softshell	44	Acanthodactvlus	Blue-tail Sand Lizard
13	, Chitra indica	Narrow-headed Softshell		cantoris	
		Turtle	45	Mesalina watsonana	Spotted Lacerta
14 B	Lissemys punctata	Indian Flapshell Turtle	46	Ophisops jerdoni	Rugose Spectacled
ы. С	Eamily Crocodylidae		۲	Family Scincidae	
¥ 15		The Mugger	47	Chalcides ocellatus	Ocellated Skink
۱۵ ۵	Eamily Gavialidae		48	Eutropis dissimilis	Striped Grass Skink
¥ 16	Cavialis concetious	Charial	49	Eutropis macularia	Bronze Grass Skink
10 C	Order Squamata	Ghanai	50	Eurvlepis taeniolatus	Common Mole Skink
С.	Sub order Sourie		51	Novoeumeces	Orange-tail Skink
A			•	blythianus	erange tan enim
♥ 17	Family Agamidae	Chart tail Cround Agama	52	Ophiomorus raithmai	Tree fringed Sand-fish
17	Brachysaura minor		53	Ophiomorus tridactylus	3-toed Sand Swimmer
18	Calotes versicolor	Common Tree Lizard	۵	Family Uromastycidae	
19	Laudakia iirata	Yellow-head Spotted	54	Saara hardwickii	Spiny-tail Ground Lizard
20	l audakia fusca	Yellow-beaded Rock	55	Saara asmussi	Seistan Spiny-tailed
20		Agama	•		Ground Lizard
21	Laudakia melanura	Black Rock Agama	>	Family Varanidae	
22	Laudakia nupta	Spiny-head Rock Agama	56	Varanus bengalensis	Bengal Monitor
23	Trapelus agilis	Common Field Agama/	57	Varanus flavescens	Yellow Monitor
		Brilliant Agama	58	Varanus griseus	Desert Monitor
24	Trapelus megalonyx	Ocellete Ground Agama		Sub Order Serpents	
25	Trapelus rubrigularis	Red throated Ground	>	Family Leptotyphlopida	e
۵	Fomily	Agama	59	Leptotyphlops blanfordii	Sindh Thread Snake
v	Chamaeleonidae		60	Leptotyphlops macrorhynchus	Beaked Thread Snake
26	Chamaeleo zeylanicus	Casque Lizard	>	Family Typhlopidae	
۵	Family Eublepharidae		61	Ramphotyphlops	Brahminy Blind Snake
27	Eublepharis macularius	Fat-tailed Gecko		braminus	
۵	Family Gekkonidae		62	Typhlops ductuliformes	Slender Blind Snake
28	Agamura persica	Persian Spider Gecko	۲	Family Boidae	
29	Bunopus tuberculatus	Tuberculated Desert	63	Eryx conicus	Chain Sand Boa
		Gecko	64	Eryx johnii	Common Sand Boa
30	Cyrtopodion kachhensie	Kachh Spotted Ground	65	Python molurus	Rock Python
31	Cyrtonodion scabrum	Common Tuborculato	۵	Family Colubridae	
51	Cynopoulon Scabrum	Ground Gecko	66	Amphiesma stolatum	Striped Keelback
32	Cyrtopodion dehakroense	Thin-toed Gecko	67	Argyrogena fasciolata	Banded Racer
33	Crossobamon orientalis	Yellow-tailed Sand Gecko	68	Boiga trigonata	Common Cat Snake
34	Hemidactylus brookii	Spotted Barn Gecko	69	Enhydris pakistanica	Sindhi Ditch Snake
35	Hemidactylus flaviviridis	Yellow-belly Common	70	Lycodon aulicus	White-spotted Wolf Snake
36	Hemidactvlus frenatus	Waif Gecko	71	Lycodon striatus	Indus Valley Wolf
37	Hemideetulue	Tree bark Gecko			Snake
5,	nemioacivius				
20	Hemidactylus leschenaultii Hemidactylus poroious	Persian House Gooke	72	Lycodon travancoricus	South Indian Wolf Snake

74	Oligodon arnensis	Banded Kukri Snake
75	Oligodon taeniolatus	Streaked Kukri Snake
76	Platyceps rhodorachis	Cliff Racer
77	Platyceps ventromaculatus	Plain's Racer
78	Psammophis condanars	Indo Burmese Sand Snake
79	Psammophis leithii	Sindhi Ribbon Snake
80	Psammophis schokari	Saharo-sindian Ribbon Snake
81	Pseudocyclophis persicus	Dark-head Dwarf Racer
82	Ptyas mucosus	Rope Snake/Dhaman
83	Spalerosophis arenarius	Red-spotted Diadem Snake
84	Spalerosophis diadema	Blotched Diadem Snake
85	Xenochrophis cerasogaster	Red-bellied Marsh Snake
86	Xenochrophis piscator	Checkered Keelback
	Family Elapidae	
87	Bungarus caeruleus	Common Krait
88	Bungarus sindanus	Sindhi Krait
89	Naja naja	Black Cobra
	Family Viperidae	
90	Daboia russelii	Russell's Chain Viper
91	Echis carinatus	Saw-scaled Viper
	Family Hydrophiidae	
92	Enhydrina schistosa	Beaked Sea Snake
93	Hydrophis caerulescens	Blue-green Sea Snake
94	Hydrophis cyanocinctus	Annulated Sea Snake
95	Hydrophis fasciatus	Small-head Banded Sea Snake
96	Hydrophis lapemoides	Persian Sea Snake
97	Hydrophis mamillaris	Broad-band Sea Snake
98	Hydrophis spiralis	Yellow Sea Snake
99	Hydrophis ornatus	Reef Sea Snake
100	Lapemis curtus	Pygmy Sea Snake
101	Microcephalophis cantoris	Spotted Small-head Sea Snake
102	Microcephalophis gracilis	Banded Small-head Sea Snake
103	Pelamis platurus	Pelagic Sea snake

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