

INDIA'S NEWEST PIT VIPER FOUND IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH

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Trimeresurus arunachalensis

India now has a fifth brown pit viper but with a reddish tinge. A team of herpetologists led by Ashok Captain have described a new species of reddish-brown pit viper — a venomous snake with a unique heat-sensing system — from a forest in West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh.

The discovery, published in the March-April volume of the *Russian Journal of Herpetology*, makes the Arunachal pit viper (*Trimeresurus arunachalensis*) the second serpent to have been discovered after the non-venomous crying keelback in the State's Lepa-Rada district in 2018.

The new species also makes Arunachal Pradesh the only Indian state to have a pit viper named after it.

Mr. Captain, who made the discovery with V. Deepak, Rohan Pandit, Bharat Bhatt, and Ramana Athreya said India had four brown pit vipers before the Arunachal Pradesh discovery.

The other four — Malabar, horseshoe, hump-nosed and Himalayan — were discovered 70 years ago. "We don't know anything of the Arunachal pit viper's natural history as only one male has been found so far. More surveys and sightings of this species would gradually give us an idea of its habits, diet and breeding, whether it lays eggs or bears live young," he told *The Hindu*.

Led by Mr. Athreya, a research team from the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Pune, had encountered the snake while conducting biodiversity surveys in Arunachal Pradesh's Eaglenest region. A resident of the area had first shown Mr Pandit the snake in a forest patch near Ramda village.

Comparative analyses of DNA sequences by Mr. Deepak and examination of morphological features by Mr. Captain suggested that the snake belonged to a species not described before.

Mr. Bhatt, a scientist of the Arunachal Pradesh forest department, said that the single known specimen of this species makes it currently the rarest pit viper in the world. The specimen was donated to the museum of the State Forest Research Institute in Itanagar.

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