

Biography of a snake charmer in Saidpur, Bangladesh

Summary

Though Saidpur Upazila under Nilphamari district is very small but here pigeonry, goat rearing, herbal treatments, circus team, monkey charmer, horse race and snake charmers are available. Snake charmers are not living well in this modern era. Their kids are not safe at home for snake rearing. In Savar, Dhaka there is a snake market where some tribal people buy it as food. People who are engaged with snake catching and snake-based superstitions go to that market. They support medical science and are waiting to get a good job. Who take snakes as food they say its meat is very hot. Depending on body size its price varies from 1000 to 2000 taka of a poisonous snake. People of the circus team, zoo committee and intersex people collects snakes from the snake charmer. Tradition of snake charming in Bangladesh is very ancient. Once upon a time most of the villagers liked it. Some peoples were considered as bede or tribal people who caught snakes from the jungle. Though Bangladesh is a small country but its 80 species of snakes are remarkable. Within these only cobras, kraits and sea snakes are poisonous and most of the cobras are bicell type. Common vine snakes, tree snake and rat snakes are very common and nonpoisonous snakes of Bangladesh. After catching a snake, the charmer cuts the poison sac or rubs both fangs of the snakes. As poison of the snakes are digestive juice so that those snakes can suffer digestive ailments and ultimately die. The temperature of Rangpur division of Bangladesh is 350-370F which is suitable for snakes' survival. There were 30.77% poisonous and 69.23% non poisonous snakes¹ in Bangladesh in three families.¹ In Bangladesh out of 82 species 28 are venomous and 12 are sea snakes.² Estimates indicate >5 million bites annually by venomous snakes worldwide where >12500 deaths.^{3,4} Some research work have completed on snakes taxonomy, status, distribution and epidemiology of snake bite.⁵⁻⁷ India has the highest number of snake bites in the world with 35000-50000 annually according to World Health Organization.^{8,9} In Bangladesh this is 4.3 per 100000 an annual incidence and case fatality is 20%.¹⁰

Species of snakes and their management

Snake species

There were four snakes where two spectacled cobra (*Naja kaouthia*) (one adult and one juvenile). One was monocled (*N. naja*) and another tree snake (*Ptyas mucosus*). Rat snake was measured 7feet long, female monocled was 5feet and two spectacled cobras both were adult female about 6 feet and juvenile 3feet (Figure 1). Snake charmer of Saidpur Md. Abul Kashem he had 30snakes few days ago including poisonous and nonpoisonous (Figures 1-3).



Figure 1 Abul Kashem with cobras.



Figure 2 Juvenile cobra.

Food

Only 2-3 fishes/snakeheaded fishes/eggs 3-4 are enough in a week for a snake. When snakes are used in performing, this food should provide slightly high.

Rearing box

Snakes are kept in a wooden box (12x12x3 inches). Very congested space is very harmful for its breeding. In cold season some snakes die. Each snake needs two hours sunlight everyday (Figure 1). Body

temperature of a diseased snake is high and it shows very anger and enlarges its eye. This situation is very dangerous while performing.



Figure 3 Charmer with rat snake.

Catching technique

Snake charmer does not use any kits for snake catching. They catch snake by open hand. They just try to concentrate snakes eye to the charmers' hand one hand and by using another hand they hold the head/neck of that snake. If that snake sudden moves back it may bites. Snake charmers know about snake catching sticks like L stick, T stick, Y stick and grab stick. Snake charmer does not catch that snake which has eggs in their ovary. Snake charmer, Md. Abul Kashem had a trained mongoose which played with snakes. If pet mongoose is well-trained not happen any harms for snakes otherwise for mongoose's bites snakes may die

Discussion

There are many superstitions about snakes in the country.¹¹ The jewel of the snakes' head, snakes dancing by whistle in movies and milk sucking of rat snake from cow is more famous story of Bangladesh but all are scientifically false. Pet of odd animals like snake is not suitable for hobby.¹² Most people fear to see snakes. This is odd pet so that do not rear snake at home and playing with them.¹²

Conclusion

Snake charmer wants suitable job except the snake charming. In this modern world, their old traditional treatment for snake biting is not scientific. Most of the snake rearers die by snake bite. Snake charmer Md. Abul Kashem in Saidpur is passing very risky days at his home with their kids. In Bangladesh there are maximum one lac bedes or snake charmers. Some NGOs are playing major role in this country for increasing awareness for snake biting. Antivenom vaccine is not available in Bangladesh. In village, if any snake bites, traditional treatment is life-threatened to the victim. Snakes can be used in biological control and venom for making anticancerous drugs. We need to establish a modern snake lab where venom will be collected for human welfare.¹³

Recommendations and implementations

There are lots of superstitions about snakes in rural or urban areas of Bangladesh. Snakes' meat is used for some diseases.¹¹ Most cobra and krait bites in Bangladesh were recorded between May and October and highest in June. Poor medical facilities in rural areas,

high cost of treatment and inadequate supply of antivenom vaccine are our major problems.^{14,15} The time of biting by cobra happens in late afternoon.^{15,16} All snake collectors and exporters must be licensed under the 'Directorate General of Forest Protection and Nature'. Most people know that snakes are harmful and when it comes out they killed instantly.¹⁷

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Conflict of interest

Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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