

DISTRIBUTION OF SNAKES IN HANTANA RANGE AND PERADENIYA UNIVERSITY PARK

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Sri Lanka is blessed with a diverse serpentine fauna, and the island harbours 93 snake species in 46 genera and 26 families.

Seven major habitat types namely Grasslands, Natural forest patches, Streams and water ways, *Pinus* plantations, Riverine forests, Agricultural lands, and managed landscape in the Hantana range and Peradeniya University Park were surveyed for six months from November 2001 to April 2002. Day and night-time survey was carried out to locate snakes and to record their microhabitats. Species identification was done in the field and photographs of snakes were taken whenever necessary.

Twenty snake species (25% of the total) including six endemics were recorded from the seven sites during the survey. Highest number of species (16) was recorded from the grasslands. Agricultural lands, Riverine forests and Natural forest held the second highest number of species with nine and eight respectively. The number of species in the grassland represents 30% of the total number present in the country.

Hantana Range and the University land are subjected to severe degradation due to human activities. The natural forests have reduced to a greater extent due to the illegal felling, and the grasslands and *Pinus* plantations are subjected to annual fires. Therefore, the most snake species found in the grasslands are heavily threatened. Study and planning programs should be initiated to conserve the diverse habitats types in the area to protect and conserve the diverse snake fauna of the area.