

FACTSHEET

RED SAND BOA

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Red Sand Boa *Eryx johnii*, also known as the Indian Sand Boa is a non-venomous snake that is variable in colour and appears as reddish-brown, speckled-grey or yellow to black. Popularly called the double-headed snake, it has a blunt tail almost resembling a head which is wedge-shaped with narrow nostrils and tiny eyes. Taxonomically, it is placed in the class Reptilia, order Serpentes, and family Boidae.

“ It is the largest of the sand boas in the world and can grow to more than 4ft long. ”

“ It is a nocturnal species and spends majority of its time under the ground. ”

“ It is an ovoviviparous species which means that the embryo that develops inside the eggs remains within the mother's body until they hatch into young ones. ”

“ It feeds mainly on rodents, lizards and even other snakes. ”

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“ It is easily recognisable due to its shovel-shaped nose and a blunt tail which appears to be chopped off. ”

ECOLOGICAL ROLE:

Just like other snake species, Red Sand Boa also plays a significant role in the ecosystem by maintaining a healthy population between prey and the predator. It feeds on rodents, lizards, and even other snakes and is often called the farmer's friend.

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SIZE, HABITAT, DISTRIBUTION AND POPULATION STATUS:

AVERAGE SIZE	HABITAT	DISTRIBUTION	POPULATION TREND
Length: 70–120 cm	Agricultural lands, grasslands, scrub forest, moist and dry deciduous forests; unused lands with sandy soil and deep cracks. It usually hides in cracks, mounds, rat holes, brick piles, rock piles.	Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh	 It is reported that the sighting rates for Red Sand Boa have declined by up to 80% in some areas, and this decline can mainly be attributed to over harvesting of the species for illegal wildlife trade.

CONSERVATION STATUS:

Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)	International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List
Schedule IV	Appendix II	Not Listed



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IN PERIL:

- **HABITAT LOSS** and fragmentation mainly due to expansion of human settlements and activities.
- **HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICT** due to the general ignorance among people about snakes, their ecological role and the laws related to their protection, often leading to their extermination.
- **ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE** mainly due to the superstitions attached to keeping these snakes at home or their sacrifice.

TRAPPING AND HUNTING FOR ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE:

Red Sand Boa is reported to be one of the most traded reptiles in India. Earlier, the species used to be displayed by snake charmers as a “double-headed” snake. However, now this morphological curiosity has landed this harmless snake in serious trouble.

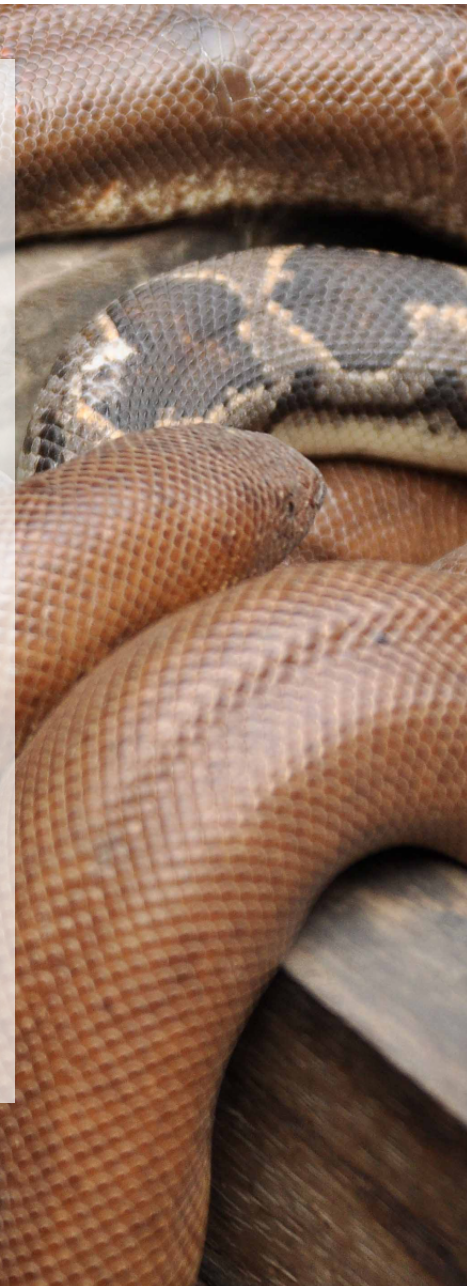
In recent years, India has witnessed a massive upsurge in demand for Red Sand Boas in its domestic illegal markets mainly due to the new age superstitions attached to them. These range from the more common ones such as they bring good luck to their keepers, to the more bizarre ones like the claim that the snake contains iridium (one of the rarest elements in the Earth's crust and highly expensive) and hence has supernatural powers.

Due to its benign nature it is very easy to collect and smuggle. The price of a Red Sand Boa on the black market is fixed as per its weight and smugglers have often been reported to feed these snakes steel bullets, as snakes weighing above 3.5 kg are preferred in illegal wildlife trade. The snakes are not just being sold but also rented out for hefty sums. Furthermore, the demand for these snakes is so high that they are also reported to be being stolen from zoos across India.

Cyberspace has further fueled its illegal trade making it easier for buyers and sellers to connect with each other. Posts related to the sale and purchase of Red Sand Boa often called the do muha saanp (Hindi, two-headed snake), have been observed on various online trading platforms.

Besides this, Red Sand Boa is also poached for its medicinal values by local communities.

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SECURING THE FUTURE OF RED SAND BOA IN INDIA:



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- Undertake detailed studies to understand the various drivers of illegal trade of the species in India. This information will be crucial for developing and undertaking adequate enforcement actions to curb this illicit trade.
- It is crucial to monitor the population density in various habitats from time to time. This will help to formulate and implement habitat restoration programmes.
- Specialised awareness activities should be organised for the local communities, farmers, and general public in order to sensitise them and help mitigate human-snake conflict.
- Awareness campaigns should be organised to bust myths and misconceptions related to keeping Red Sand Boas.
- Inter-governmental organisations should develop strategic measures to combat the rise of cross-boundary trade in the species taking place to meet demand in the national and international markets.



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