



## Editorial

# Russell's Viper Phobia

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The English name of *Chandrabora* is Russell's Viper. Sir Patrick Russell worked on the taxonomy of the snakes of our subcontinent at the end of the 17th century. He was the first to identify and analyze many of the snakes in the region literally. During the final classification of snakes in the 18th century, Sir Russell's fellow scientists added his name to this snake. From then on *Chandrabora* became Russell's Viper.

It is said to be the 5th most venomous snake in the world. But this is not correct. According to the experts, it is not even among the first 30 deadly snakes in the international ranking. Rather, its position is after the Gokhara (Cobra) snake of our country. In untreated cases, the patient may die after on an average of 8 hours if bitten by a Gokhara snake, after on an average of 18 hours if bitten by a Keute (common krait) and after on an average of 72 hours (3 days) after bitten by a *Chandrabora* or Russell's viper. According to the specialist, a bitten patient doesn't die early before 72 hours if he or she has no other illness. In Bangladesh, there is a survival record up to 15 days after the bite of this snake.

Though the snake is reported to be eradicated, there was a biting history in 2013 at Rajshahi. Formerly, the snake was mostly seen in Barendra region, it is then spread in the Padma basin. Besides the Rajshahi region, this snake has invaded in 26 to 27 districts including Manikganj, Faridpur, Shariatpur, Madaripur, Chandpur, Rajbari, Barisal, Patuakhali, Chittagong. Although it is usually found in agricultural land or grazing area, there is a record of snake death by beating inside the house and playground in dip district Bhola.

The Ministry of Environment said, "As Russell's Viper has efficient swimming capability it is easily spread to various parts of the country by river flow and flooded water. So, all are advised to be careful."

### To avoid snake bites, The Ministry of Environment advised:

1. Move with caution to the areas where Russell's Vipers have been spotted.

2. Be careful when walking in tall grass, bushes, agricultural areas and do not put your hands and feet in the holes of muddy floors.
3. Wear gum boots and long pants when working in the inhabited area.
4. Always use torch light while traveling at night.
5. Keep the surroundings of the house clean and free of garbage.
6. Take special attention when removing fallen trees, firewood and straw.
7. If you see a snake, do not try to catch or kill it, if necessary, call the national helpline number 333 or inform the nearest forest department office.

### Things to be done after being bitten by a snake:

1. Restrict the movement of the bitten limb as muscle contraction caused by arm or leg movement spreads the venom rapidly through the bloodstream and whole body.
2. The affected area should be gently washed with soap or wiped with a wet cloth.
3. Remove the watches or ornaments or amulets/trinkets etc.
4. Don't cut, puncture or apply any kind of dressing or any topical cream into the bitten area.
5. Don't waste time unnecessarily seeking the treatment provided by traditional healers (Ozhas).
6. Go to the nearest hospital or healthcare center as soon as possible.
7. Don't panic, Russell's Viper antivenom is available at the nearest government hospital which is free of cost.

In case of snakebite, the important thing is to take the patient to the hospital quickly. Then, it will be possible to recover the patient by providing proper treatment. It is very important to make people aware of snake bites and encourage people that there should not be delay in bringing the patient to the hospital. The existence of Russell's Viper was mentioned in The Ministry's press release as a public phobia. Although it is alarming, everybody should remember that the chances of people affected by this snake are low. This snake usually inhabits lowland, grasslands, thickets, open forests, agricultural areas as well as

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avoiding human residences. The snake is natural earth in color so can easily mix with the soil. If people go too close to the snake without noticing, it will attack in fear of danger. So, everyone is requested to be careful by The Ministry.

The Ministry of Environment has also emphasized the way to maintain the ecological balance without killing snakes. The notification said “Beji (weasel), Gui saph (monitor lizard), Bagdash (Indian civet), Gandhogokul (masked palm civet), Bon biral (wild cat), Mecho biral (fishing cat), Tiil Nag Eagle (crested serpent eagle), Sarosh (Crane), Madan Tak (greater adjutant) and some species of snakes eat at the Russell’s Vipers to keep their number in balance.”

In nature due to indiscriminate killing of these wild animals by humans the number of Russell’s Viper is raising. Therefore, avoid killing the snakes without any reasons and refrain from destroying their habitats. It should be remembered that snakes do not only benefit us by eating rats, but their venom is also the raw material of many medicines like heart disease, stroke, blood pressure and even painkillers. Somewhere Officials have announced cash rewards for killing snakes. It is considered a crime in view of the environment.

#### **Sources**

Electronic media, Internet, The Ministry of Environment.