

Doon Watch Nature Series for Dehradun Live Hindustan Times by Sanjay Sondhi

Published on 19 August 2011

Indian Bull Frog

Two large, bleary eyes glared out at me from the crevice in the rock wall. A blunt snout protruded out, as the creature glared at me angrily. On a night walk near my house, I had spotted the Indian Bull Frog (*Hoplobatrachus tigerinus*), India's largest frog. Peering out at me from its hiding place, I knew that there was no way the frog would emerge until I had ceased to appear as a threat to it. So I walked away from the spot, and returned five minutes later. Knowing that frogs are reasonably trusting creatures (they come out of hiding quite quickly, based on my past experience!), my timing was perfect. The handsome creature was now out in the open, allowing me to observe it in its full splendour. Sitting motionless, the bulky frog almost seemed to be flexing its muscles, as it sat unconcerned on the ground!



The Indian Bull Frog is a stocky frog with a blunt snout growing up to 16 cm in length when fully grown. Along with numerous longitudinal warts on its olive brown back, it has a pale stripe along its body. During the monsoons, one can hear the frog calling, announcing its presence to the female and other intruding males with a loud "bong, bong". During its breeding season (the monsoons), one is likely to see many juveniles of the bull frog. These younger frogs are green in colour, nothing like the dull coloured adult.

Though quite common throughout India, the bull frog is protected by wildlife laws in

India, being in the Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. This means that it has the same level of protection as the tiger! The primary reason for this protection is that frog's legs, which are considered a delicacy in many parts of Asia resulted in large scale hunting and exports of this creature in the past. With the protection offered to it, its hunting has reduced, even though the frog is still eaten locally by many local communities. In Goa, restaurants have been serving this frog as a dish titled Jumpin' Chicken! In many parts of north east India, it still sells in markets for local consumption. In fact during a recent visit to a market in Nagaland, I found the frog being sold in baskets-at five frogs for a hundred rupees, strung up on a rope.

In eating wild creatures, such as the frog, a person often ends up breaking the law, and is a punishable offense. However, many people don't really know about this. The shopkeeper in Nagaland selling the frogs had no idea that she was breaking the law- because eating frogs and other wild meat had been part of the local culture for generations.

Feedback on this column is welcome at sanjay.sondhi1@gmail.com

Making a difference: Do you eat wild animals? Or do you know of people who do? Well, if, the answer to any of these questions is a yes, then you need to ascertain whether this is, indeed, legal. Breaking the law, even unknowingly is still a punishable offense! If you need to check this out, feel free to write in to me!

Photograph caption: Indian Bull Frog

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