

Guardians of the Evening Road:

Pythons of Asola Bhatti

- Feba K.S., Shubham Kumar Maletha, Mukesh Chand, Rashi Nautiyal and Dr. B.S. Adhikari

One evening in early September, around 6 pm, while navigating Asola Bhatti's winding sanctuary roads, I encountered one of the sanctuary's elusive guardians: a python sprawled across the road. Resting calmly, it seemed undisturbed even as I neared, basking in the residual warmth of the pavement as the sun dipped below the horizon. This was not an isolated event and between September to October, a pattern became clear. Around five individual pythons were encountered on the roads within the sanctuary in the evening. These sightings underscore an interesting behaviour in pythons: using the sanctuary's roads to conserve energy and maintain their body temperature in the absence of direct sunlight. This behaviour not only offers a unique glimpse into the pythons' survival strategies but also highlights their vulnerability when choosing such exposed locations.

Behavioural Insight: Why Pythons Choose Roads

'[Basking](#)' is a prominent thermoregulatory behaviour observed in many animals, allowing them to optimize physiological functions. Being [ectothermic](#), reptiles like pythons produce minimal metabolic heat and depend heavily on external heat sources to regulate their body temperature, with prolonged basking periods in colder weather to attain optimum body temperature for carrying out physiological activities. Roads, with their heat-absorbing properties, provide an ideal warm surface for thermoregulation, particularly in the evening and nighttime. This underscores the significance of basking durations, especially during the [breeding](#) season (October to egg-laying in May) for Indian rock pythons. This thermal resource is vital not only for reproduction but also for overall [metabolism](#) and movement. Other possible reasons for pythons choosing roads might be the open and expansive nature of these pathways, which allows them to cover large areas with minimal obstacles. They may also be drawn to roads in search of prey or potential mating opportunities.



Python basking on the road with the surrounding evening landscape of Asola Bhatti Wildlife sanctuary

A Rare Sighting in a Transformed Landscape

One of the more striking observations was near the newly felled plantation area in the Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary, where we spotted a python on the road around 9 pm. In this area, the natural habitat had already been completely cleared and soil freshly dug up to prepare for the new plantation. Despite the lack of cover, the python was calmly resting on the road, a reminder of how adaptable these creatures are, even in altered habitats. Roads cut through natural habitats, leading to fragmented landscapes and the snakes may be using the roads to move between patches of suitable habitats.

A Call for Awareness: Protecting Asola Bhatti's Road-Dweller

Several other species, including jackals, monkeys, birds, amphibians, and reptiles, were also sighted on these roads, making them a bustling avenue for wildlife at dusk. A jackal den was also found near one



Python resting near a newly transformed area within Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary



Jackal inside its den near the road in Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary

of these roads, further emphasizing the proximity of wildlife activities to these pathways. This showcases how sanctuary roads inadvertently become part of the ecosystem, being used extensively by a variety of species, making it essential for all visitors to tread carefully.

Conclusion

Silent Guardians of Asola Bhatti: Our observations of pythons in Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary reveal the unique ways these snakes adapt to human-altered landscapes, including the regular use of roads for thermoregulation and movement. Despite being a wildlife refuge, the sanctuary's proximity to urban areas means that people, often passing through at restricted times, are likely to encounter these fascinating reptiles on the roads. This underscores the importance of careful driving, speed regulations, and respecting wildlife spaces, especially as habitat fragmentation continues to influence animal behaviours in unexpected ways. Such insights highlight a need for further awareness and protective measures to safeguard both snakes and other wildlife from unintended harm in semi-urban sanctuaries like Asola Bhatti. By understanding these behaviours and encouraging responsible visitor actions, we can help preserve the natural balance and unique biodiversity within these precious habitats.



Python basking by the road near the feeding centre of Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary

About the authors:

Feba K.S, Shubham Kumar Maletha, Mukesh Chand and Rashi Nautiyal are researchers at the Wildlife Institute of India, working as Project Associates in the project “Developing an Integrated Management Plan for Asola-Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary, New Delhi”.

Dr. B.S. Adhikari- Scientist G, PI of the project “Developing an Integrated Management Plan for Asola-Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary, New Delhi”.