

File:Kalakuta

Singh, L.A.K. (1984): *Eublepharis hardwickii* (Reptilia, Gekkonidae). The Kalakuta observed at Tikerpada, Orissa. *J. Bombay nat. Hist.Soc.*, December 1984, 81(3): 708-709.



The common fat-tailed gecko, *Eublepharis macularius* is relatively better known and described (Smith, 1935, Daniel, 1983) than its ally *Eublepharis hardwickii* for which Smith emphasized a highly circumscribed range of distribution and mentioned that nothing has been recorded on the species' habits. Smith (1935) wrote: "it is definitely known from Chotanagpur and Orissa and the adjacent districts of Bengal, the Madras Presidency, the central and united provinces...".

In the Satkoshia Gorge Sanctuary of Orissa *Eublepharis hardwickii* is not uncommon at Tikerpada, a village at the foot of hills ranging up to 600 metres on the bank of river Mahanadi. In the night, during summer and rains, these may be found on the forest roads or on open areas, and in the day several individuals have been recovered from underneath rocks and stones.

The body colouration varies from reddish-brown to very dark brown (as stated by Smith, 1935) to almost black. The transverse markings are cream-coloured to light yellow. The transverse markings on the tail are dull whitish. During a period of about six years several of these geckoes were received at the Gharial research and Conservation Unit, Tikerpada. All these were accidentally caught and none exceeded 20 cm.

In captivity *E. hardwickii* is very timid, allowing to be lifted by hand and accepting a variety of insects as diet. Attempts to catch a prey was incited only by the victim's body movement. At least one definite case of cannibalism was recorded in captivity – mode of capture was from the neck and during swallowing the victim lay with its ventral side up. *E. hardwickii* never took water from a container in captivity; instead, they used to wait for an artificial shower to lick off drops falling on their head or sticking to the surfaces on the surroundings. The tongue is pinkish red, flat, thin and able to extend

over to the eyes and head. One or two leathery eggs (approx. 20 x 10 mm) are laid and buried in soil.

Eublepharis hardwickii is called the *Kalakuta Sapa* in Orissa (Oriya: *Kalakuta* = one which brings the message of death, and *Sapa* = snake). The local name originates from belief that these geckoes are highly poisonous, can climb trees (which these can) and after a bite the higher they climb the effect of the poison gets gradually intensified. The gecko makes a shrill vibrating noise when surprised.

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NOTES:

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The observations on *E. hardwickii* were mostly taken during the period July 1975 to January 1981. The paper was published in 1984.

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