recognize prey species. We found that the selected spider species was available in large numbers under the stairwell of the apartment building in which the nest was found. But several studies have suggested that factors other than abundance wasp wasps\textsuperscript{5,6}. So, in our case, it is difficult to speculate whether the heavy reliance on one spider species was a result of its ample availability, or an intricately evolved chemical prey-selection mechanism. Or did the wasp choose the site with maximum availability of its selected spider to build its nest?


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**Miss Kerala in peril**

Science sans ethics takes a heavy toll on wild animals year after year. A recent paper published on the reproductive biology of Miss Kerala (a freshwater fish, *Puntius denisonii*) had in the process sacrificed 1080 individuals\textsuperscript{1}. *P. denisonii* is endemic to the streams and rivers of northern Kerala and the adjoining western fringes of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu\textsuperscript{2}.

*P. denisonii* is easily the most vividly coloured of Indian freshwater fishes. Although the species was scientifically described as early as 1865 (ref. 3) it had not attracted the attention of aquarists till about 20 years ago, as the formalin-preserved specimens available in zoological collections are far from attractive, providing little clue to its natural splendour. However, a species that stayed ‘dormant’ for 130 years was ‘rediscovered’ as soon as live specimens and photographs came to light during the 1990s, and since then the species has been unscrupulously caught and traded as the ‘Red Line Torpedo Barb’ (Miss Kerala is a more recent synonym).

The complete geographical range, life history and population dynamics of *P. denisonii* are poorly understood. Nevertheless, based on the available ecological information and considering the heavy harvest pressures the species is faced with, the most recent conservation assessment of freshwater biodiversity in the Western Ghats has placed it in the Red List of IUCN in the endangered category\textsuperscript{3}.

IUCN has prescribed a set of guidelines for the scientific collection of threatened species\textsuperscript{4}. And under the section titled ‘Responsible collecting’, it has stated ‘Scientists working on globally threatened species should act responsibly to ensure that their research is either directed towards enhancing the conservation status of the species that they are studying, or providing important information that will assist in the conservation of the species. They should ensure that: (i) The material they need is not already available in the museum or other institutional collections; (ii) They do not collect more than the minimum number of specimens necessary for the accomplishment of their research; (iii) They use non-lethal sampling methods instead of lethal collecting when the research objectives allow this, and employ preferential collection of post-reproductive individuals (or the life stage with the least reproductive value) when lethal collection is essential for enhancing the survival prospects of the species; (iv) They place all specimens collected in institutions where they can be preserved in perpetuity and be made available to other scientists, thus limiting the need for further collections; and (v) They submit copies of reports and publications based on their research in a timely manner to permit-issuing agencies.’

The IUCN guidelines\textsuperscript{1} also go on to state, ‘Scientists should consult and comply with these guidelines (and, obviously, any collecting must be in full accordance with the laws and regulations of the country, state, or province where the collecting is being conducted)\textsuperscript{4}.

As the authors\textsuperscript{1} did not discuss the rationale behind the large-scale killing of an endangered species of fish and as the publication\textsuperscript{1} offers no clue as to whether the authors were aware of the IUCN guidelines for responsible collecting\textsuperscript{4}, pertinent questions emerge: (1) how widely known are the IUCN guidelines, and (2) to what extent does a global assessment of threat status of any species influence conservation planning in India?

It cannot be disputed that the only available legal instrument in India that accords protection to wild animals is the
Will development spare the spiny-tailed lizards in Kachchh?

The Indian spiny-tailed lizard is a unique reptile that belongs to the family Agamidae. According to Wilms et al., its generic name has been recently resurrected from Uromastyx hardwickii to Sara hardwickii. It occurs in large numbers in isolated patches in the drylands of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat (Kachchh) and Pakistan. These solitary lizards excavate twisting burrows (6–8 cm wide; 2 m long) for safe living. They are mostly herbivores, but occasionally feed on insects and hibernate in winter.

The spiny-tailed lizard has been listed in the CITES (Appendix II) and Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act (Schedule II). Although the 1998 IUCN Red List had listed the lizard as vulnerable, it has gone missing in the recent list. It is known locally as ‘Sandho’ in Gujarat, and is hunted due to its aphrodisiac value. The ongoing land developments are already displacing these lizards due to the construction of a large number of housing and industrial units across rural Kachchh.

Following the 2001 earthquake, the Kachchh District (area 45,652 sq. km) gained prominence for growth in the development of a large number of housing and industrial units across rural Kachchh.

Figure 1. An immature spiny-tailed lizard ventures out of its den in Khadir village, Kachchh.