

Inclusion of Mount Kenya Bush Viper *Atheris desaixi* in Appendix II

Proponent: Kenya

Summary: The Mount Kenya or Ashe's Bush Viper *Atheris desaixi* is a medium-sized primarily arboreal venomous snake confined to mid-altitude forests in central Kenya, with two known populations, one in Igembe and Ngaya forests in the Nyambene hills, and the other at Chuka, south eastern Mt Kenya forest. These areas total less than 10km² between them. However, the species is secretive and may be more widespread than records indicate¹. Population data are limited, but a rapid field assessment of the species in 2010 yielded only 12 individuals in Chuka, whilst searches around Igembe and Ngaya forests were unfruitful. Local snake collectors reported that numbers had declined remarkably over the years. Females bear 10 to 13 live young per brood.

Ngaya forest is a government protected community forest. The species is believed to be affected by habitat loss and degradation, the forests in which it occurs being under high pressure from livestock grazing, fuel-wood collection, logging and agricultural expansion. It has been suggested that collection for illegal trade may also have had an impact on the species.

Atheris desaixi has been protected in Kenya since 1982. Current legislation prohibits both collection from the wild and export. In 1999/2000, 27 individuals were reportedly illegally exported by one trader², and US trade data records the import into the USA of 16 wild individuals in 2007 to 2008. Three snakes were rescued from a local snake collector during the rapid assessment survey in 2010. The species has been reported to fetch values of up to USD 4500 in Europe. However, there are no data to indicate whether this trade is increasing or not. The species appears to be relatively rare in captivity and the size of the market (specialist collectors) is almost certainly small³. Hobbyists report some captive breeding success.

Analysis: Available information indicates that *Atheris desaixi* has a very restricted range where it is subject to habitat loss and degradation. A 2010 survey found it rare, with reports of a decline in population at one site. There is evidence of demand on international markets. However, the market (specialist collectors) is almost certainly small. Recorded instances of such trade are at a very low level. All current trade from the range State is illegal. Because all trade in wild specimens is theoretically already fully regulated, the species does not appear to meet the criteria for inclusion on Appendix II (it may meet the criteria for inclusion in Appendix I).

Reviewers: S. Spawls, J. Penner, S. Chng and J. Janssen.

References:

Information not referenced in Summary section is from the Supporting Statement.

¹ Ngwava, J.M. (2010) Mt Kenya Bush Viper (*Atheris desaixi*, Ashe, 1968): Distribution, Conservation Status and Impacts of Trade on Wild Populations in Kenya. MSc Thesis, International University of Andalusia, Spain.

² CITES (2004) CoP13. Pop. 30. <https://www.cites.org/eng/cop/13/prop/E13-P30.pdf>. Viewed on 23rd May 2016.

³ Jenkins, M. (2016) *In litt.* to the IUCN/TRAFFIC Analyses team. Cambridge, UK.