

Protobothrops kaulbacki's coloration is green dorsally, with a vertebral series of dark angular spots, which may be joined to form a zigzag stripe. The top of the head is black with yellow stripes. Ventrally, except for the whitish throat area, it is gray with large squarish or crescent-shaped yellow spots.

INDIA'S KAULBACK'S LANCE-HEAD PIT VIPER **A SNAKE OF LEGEND**

VISHAL SANTRA ENCOUNTERS A VERY UNCOMMON AND MUCH FEARED SPECIES IN THE MISTY FORESTS OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH



The adult males of this beautiful and very rarely observed species may attain a total length of 134 cm (53 in), which includes a tail 22.5 cm (8.9 in) long. Females may grow longer: maximum total length 141 cm (56 in), tail 23 cm (9.1 in).

TEXT AND PHOTOS
BY VISHAL SANTRA

*K*aulback's pitviper or Kaulback's lance-head pitviper *Protobothrops kaulbacki* is a very poorly known snake. Not much is known about its natural history or ecology. Mild temperament, slow moving but capable of sudden fast strikes. Known to hunt small to medium sized mammals and birds. The specimen we found in Arunachal Pradesh was almost 6 meters up on the crux of a tree. And during release we observed that it climbed more than that. Females fiercely guard their clutch of eggs. Eggs are laid inside tree hollows and under huge fallen logs. The Kaulback's pit viper is feared by the

Nyishi tribes of Arunachal Pradesh to insane levels. They call it the "Barta". Whenever the Nyishi tribals come across one, it is sure to be killed. The beauty of this species is physical as well as divine. I mean to say that the magnificence, the charm and aura that this species carries is greatly magnified by the type of location and habitat it is found in. If you get to travel deep into the lush evergreen forests of Arunachal Pradesh the splendor and smell of the forest takes over your mind and every living creature you come across becomes beautiful and magical. I have experienced this. Forests of this kind have

so much impact on you that you lose it. The incredible power and originality of such forests almost make me cry. And the most amazing thing is that when I stand in front of such lush magnificent forests I cry and till date I have not been able to figure out why I cry. It is just so powerful that tears roll down automatically and you feel blessed and at complete peace. Also another fact that makes *Protobothrops kaulbacki* more special is the fact that it has been encountered so less and by a handful of people. Myself being one of the lucky among them. It is indeed an incredible species to look at and admire. ●

This species is oviparous. The adult female lays a clutch of 6-32 eggs in a hole in the ground, and then remains with the eggs to guard them. The hatchlings are 26-27 cm (about 10½ inches) in total length.





Protobothrops kaulbacki ■ had originally been known only from the type locality, which is "Pangnamdim, north of the Triangle, Upper Burma" (Myanmar). In 2005 it was reported that it is also found in China, and now it has also been reported from Northeast India.