

TRAFFIC



INDIAN SPINY-TAILED LIZARD

**FACTSHEET ON INDIAN SPINY-TAILED LIZARD
IN ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE**



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Indian Spiny-tailed Lizard *Saara hardwickii* is a herbivorous, solitary and burrow-dwelling reptile found in the arid and semi-arid regions¹⁷ of north-western India³.

Popularly known as “*Sandha*” or “*Sandho*”, it is one of the 231 lizard species found in the country. Taxonomically, it is placed in the class Reptilia, order Squamata, and Family Agamidae.

DID YOU KNOW?


- Indian Spiny-tailed Lizard is the only herbivorous lizard in the Indian Subcontinent⁴. While the adults are herbivorous, juveniles may opportunistically feed on insects⁸.
- Its body colour changes with the temperature. As the lizard becomes warmer, its body turns pale brown or beige with little orange patches on the back, and the tail appears azure blue in the species found in Rajasthan. At extremely hot temperatures, it appears almost white in colour⁹.

ECOLOGICAL ROLE

Indian Spiny-tailed Lizard plays a significant ecological function by serving as prey to foxes, raptors,

crows, and snakes⁵, that share its ecosystem.

SIZE, HABITAT, DISTRIBUTION AND POPULATION STATUS

AVERAGE SIZE	HABITAT	DISTRIBUTION	POPULATION STATUS
Body length: 16.8 to 24 cm Tail length: 14.3 to 20.7 cm Maximum total length: 43.8 cm ¹⁶	Grassland habitats in plains of arid or semi-arid areas in forests, riverbanks, bamboo and palm thickets, grass slopes, and rocky areas ⁷	Haryana, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh ¹⁷	¹⁷ 

CONSERVATION STATUS

WILDLIFE (PROTECTION) ACT, 1972	Schedule II
CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA (CITES)	Appendix II
INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE (IUCN) RED LIST	Vulnerable

Being listed in the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972; poaching, trade, or any other form of utilisation of this species or any of its body parts is a punishable offence. Its international trade is further regulated under CITES.

THREATS

In India, the population of the Indian Spiny-tailed Lizard is presumed to be locally extinct in Uttar Pradesh, and the population in Madhya Pradesh is reportedly declining. Presently, the species is primarily restricted to the

desert regions of northwest India. Habitat loss and illegal wildlife trade are the two most immediate threats to the species.

HABITAT DEGRADATION AND LOSS

Habitat loss¹⁷ and alteration due to urbanisation, canal irrigation, afforestation, agricultural expansion, and large-scale infrastructure projects

such as solar and wind farms pose a significant threat to the survival of this species¹⁴.

TRAPPING AND HUNTING FOR ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE

The Indian Spiny-tailed lizard is poached and traded for its meat, blood, oil, and skin. It is trapped by noose snares, traps and by targeting their burrows⁹. The meat is consumed as a delicacy by locals, and the oil obtained from the skin and tail of the lizard is sold as a local remedy for ailments including joint pains¹².

Different regions in Rajasthan have been identified as poaching and trading centres for the Indian Spiny-tailed Lizard, from where derivatives (such as oil) are smuggled to Bihar, Karnataka, Maharashtra, New Delhi, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh. The seizures of the species have also been recorded from Gujarat.



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Seizures of live Spiny-tailed Lizards have been reported at Desert National Park in Rajasthan. Other seizures of both live and dead lizards and their products have been reported in Bangalore, Karnataka, and Mumbai, Maharashtra, both areas outside its range but where the demand for its products drove trafficking.



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SECURING THE FUTURE OF THE INDIAN SPINY-TAILED LIZARD

- Securing the habitat of the Indian Spiny-tailed Lizard is the first step toward its conservation. Therefore, it is crucial to **prevent unsustainable land-use change due to agriculture and implement habitat protection measures** such as establishing community based conservation areas in their geographic distribution ranges.
- **Research needs to be undertaken to understand the population dynamics and distribution of the species** in the wild. This information will help develop a long term strategy for species conservation.
- **Raising awareness** about the species among local communities and consumers is crucial to reducing the demand for the species.
- Immediate wildlife law enforcement action to stop poaching and smuggling of the Indian Spiny-tailed Lizard is needed. Therefore, **enhancing enforcement officials' knowledge and skill for identifying and implementing wildlife laws** will help combat the illicit trade of Indian Spiny-tailed lizards.

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TRAFFIC is a leading non-governmental organisation working globally on trade in wild animals and plants in the context of both biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.

For further information, contact:

TRAFFIC, India Office
C/O WWF-India Secretariat
172-B, Lodi Estate
New Delhi- 110003

trafficind@wwfindia.net

TRAFFIC®



TRAFFIC, India Office
Tel: 011-43516290/41504786

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