

When a python turned the tables on an eagle

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On 1st April 2009, members of the Pratapgarh unit of the Foundation for Ecological Security were on a field trip to the Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary, as part of an ongoing project to assess its biodiversity, and understand the threats to the sanctuary. The Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary is located at the tri-junction of Udaipur, Pratapgarh and Chittorgarh districts of Rajasthan and at the confluence of the Aravalli Hills, Vindhyan Mountains and the Malwa Plateau.

When walking along the Karmohi rivulet we saw a Crested Serpent Eagle *Spilornis cheela* swoop on a young Indian rock python *Python molurus* resting on a small tree at the edge of the rivulet. The bird was unable to lift the python and the snake, instead, fell into the water below. The bird did not give up and once again flew down, into the water, and grasped the heavy snake in its talons, as it could not lift it out of the water. Soon we saw the python begin to coil itself around the bird! Even as we watched the tables were turned and the eagle found itself being constricted. The raptor was soon struggling to get out of the python's coils and at the same time keep its head above the water.

The entire episode lasted 30 mins, and we were not the only observers. Some of the local people insisted on separating the two, even as we sought to dissuade them, arguing that nature should take its own course. The two animals were gently separated, and even as the python swam away, a visibly relieved serpent eagle,



Fig. 1. Crested Serpent-Eagle *Spilornis cheela* holding an Indian rock python *Python molurus* underwater.

flew on to a nearby tree where it perched for several minutes before flying away.



Fig. 2. Crested Serpent-Eagle *Spilornis cheela* entangled in the coils of an Indian rock python *Python molurus*.

Both: B. K. Sharma