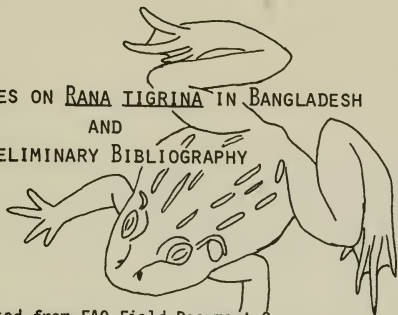


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BIOLOGICAL NOTES ON RANA TIGRINA IN BANGLADESH
AND
PRELIMINARY BIBLIOGRAPHY



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"An evaluation of the populations of
the commercially exploited frog
Rana tigrina in Bangladesh"

CHARLES M. FUGLER
Department of Biological Sciences
University of North Carolina at Wilmington

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INTRODUCTION

An intensive search of the literature pertaining to Rana tigrina and to other commercially exploited anurans of southeast Asia reveals a paucity of published data on the biology of the species in question. Those published studies pertaining to the biology of Rana tigrina concern populations of northern and western India in which the environmental conditions are significantly divergent from those of Bangladesh. The systematics and biogeography of Rana tigrina are well documented.

The data herein are the only significant biological information extant on Rana tigrina from the Indian subcontinent. In view of the temporal restrictions within which the field studies were pursued, the conclusions drawn are tentative.

Rana tigrina is widely distributed through the subcontinent of India and southeast Asia. Its populations are most abundant in wetlands, natural and artificial, and are absent from, or uncommon in, forested areas.

Rana tigrina is known to inhabit all districts of Bangladesh, avoiding, as far as known, the immediate coastal areas. The greatest population densities are in the Districts of Mymensingh and Sylhet. The species is less frequently encountered, exclusive of the coastal areas, in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

The current study is concerned with the status of the Bangladeshi populations as it pertains to size-cohorts, reproductive data and food preferences.

AMPHIBIAN FAUNA OF BANGLADESH

Husain and Rahman (1978) reported eleven species from Bangladesh (Bufo melanostichus, Kaloula pulchra, Microhyla ornata, M. rubra, Rana cyanophlyctis, R. hexadactyla, R. limnocharis, R. tigrina, R. tytleri, Rhacophorus leucomastix, Rh. maculatus). Although incompletely documented, the amphibian fauna of Bangladesh, when compared to those of adjacent regions, is impoverished. Intensive field collecting may increase the number of species within the national boundaries. The absence of significant physiographic and phytogeographic diversity will negate a significant faunistic increase.

One species (R. tigrina) and possibly two other species (R. hexadactyla, R. limnocharis) are of significant economic value. Husain and Rahman (1978) noted, for the six-month period July 1975 to January 1976, the foreign exchange earned by the export of frozen frog-legs was Taka 6,474,434 (approximately U. S. \$359,000) according to the official statistics of the Bangladesh Export Promotion Board.

REPRODUCTION

In Bangladesh, the breeding season is initiated at the onset of the first seasonal rains, usually mid-April. Reproductive activity is intense through mid-July (K. Z. Husain, personal communication). A seasonal rainfall will activate feeding and reproductive behavior. An early (February 1982) rainfall at Mymensingh was sufficient to initiate breeding responses. The larvae survived and subsequently metamorphosed because of abundant standing water. At Barisal, aseasonal rain induced breeding activity, but the larvae failed to survive in the absence of standing water. Rana tigrina, therefore, is an opportunistic breeder in which rainfall elicits reproductive behavioral responses. Reproductive activity continues well into the monsoonal season, diminishing in intensity and frequency correlative to the decrease in intensity and frequency of rainfall.

Rana tigrina oviposits in "new water" of the monsoon rather than in stagnant waters depleted of oxygen. In "new water" less particulate matter is present, the temperature is lower and the oxygen content is higher. The abiotic requirements for larval development are, in part, fulfilled.

At the advent of the breeding cycle the males, the first to emerge from underground retreats, begin frenetic pre-reproductive activities, establishing territories by emitting species-specific calls. The voiceless female is thereby attracted to the territorial male. The chorusing males are highly vulnerable to predators.

Daniel (1975) observed similar reproductive behavior in Rana tigrina near Bombay, India. The males, lemon-yellow in color, congregate in rainwater pools and ditches, chorusing loudly as they await the females. The arriving females are fought over, the nearest male clasping the female, fending off competitors by kicking strongly with the hind legs. The spawn is deposited in rainwater pools and in other transitory waters. The ova float upon deposition, thence sink to the bottom where they remain until hatching.

Dutta and Mohanty-Hejmadi (1978) concluded that Rana tigrina has the most rapid developmental rate among local (Vani Vihar, Bhubaneswar, India) amphibians. At the aforementioned localities hatching occurs 23 hours postfertilization, external gills at 44 3/4 hours, limb buds at 19 days, well defined limbs and tail at 30 days, and complete metamorphosis at 33 days. Rana tigrina attains metamorphosis at 43 days postfertilization under controlled laboratory conditions. Breeding during the monsoon and rapid larval development permit escape from the pressures of desiccation and diminished larval predation attendant upon other sympatric amphibian species (Dutta and Mohanty-Hejmadi, 1978).

SIZE VARIATION

Few published references pertaining to the maximum snout-vent length of Rana tigrina are extant. Issac and Rege (1975) recorded on unsexed individual (unquestionably female) measuring 175 mm snout-vent length from Bombay. In western India, adult females occasionally exceed 160 mm snout-vent length. Males are invariably of lesser snout-vent length, although Mansukhani and Murthy (1970) claimed that males range from 178 mm to 188 mm, and females from 132 mm to 152 mm, snout-vent length, in Rajasthan, India. These data, obviously a size reversal of sexual morphometrics, are not corroborated by published observations. Murthy (1968) noted that females attain a larger size (178 mm - 188 mm) than males (143 mm - 165 mm) when sexually mature (Madras, India).

Eight population samples, randomly selected, of Rana tigrina from diverse districts of Bangladesh suggest that the mean snout-vent length of both sexes is significantly less than those of the Indian conspecifics although comparative data are minimal.

Males.--The mean size-cohort of males is 101-110 mm (24% of all males examined) although 23.1% of all males examined are in the 91-100 mm size-cohort. Thus, approximately 50% of the males examined measure from 91 mm to 110 mm in snout-vent length. Males greater than 150 mm snout-vent length were not encountered in the population sample (Table 1).

Males are the first emergents at the onset of the monsoonal rains. Those males of larger size are immediately removed from the reproductively active populations by the field collectors. The vociferous calls and breeding colors attract the attention of predators, human and others. The breeding stock, therefore, is composed of smaller males.

In the population samples obtained in early May and early June, the mean size-cohorts of males are 121-130 mm and 131-140 mm. The mean size-cohorts of later populations decline to 91-100 mm and 101-110 mm.

Females.--The mean size-cohort of females, 111-120 mm, includes 24.1% of all females examined. The size-cohort 121-130 mm contains 11.3% of all females examined. Less than 1% of the 915 females examined exceed 150 mm snout-vent length.

The mean size-cohorts of females in population samples of early May and early June are 111-120 mm and 131-140 mm. Later population samples, with slight fluctuation, decline to mean size-cohorts of 111-120 mm and ultimately to 91-100 mm.

Females emerge from hibernation after males and thence enter reproductive activities. The mean size-cohorts of the females, with slight fluctuation, exhibit a decline from early June (131-140 mm). The fluctuation in mean size-cohort may be attributable to local climatic conditions, primarily the onset of the monsoonal rains.

The distribution of snout-vent frequencies suggest that the populations of Bangladesh are severely stressed if the maximal snout-vent lengths of the Indian populations are characteristic of the species. That the Bangladeshi populations represent a geographic variant not conspecific with those of India is implausible should snout-vent length be considered a primary criterion.

Postmetamorphic growth.--The growth rates of Rana tigrina under natural and under laboratory conditions are unknown. The mean size-cohort frequencies of the populations obtained in May and June do not evidence bimodality characteristic of annual size-classes. It may be suggested that the mean size-classes represent those individuals surviving one growth-season and the following period of inactivity. Those individuals, with significant overlap, exceeding the mean size-cohort, may have survived two growth-seasons. Individuals of lesser snout-vent length are possibly recruits of the previous growth-season.

Base line data on this extremely important aspect of the biology of Rana tigrina are urgently required. It is certainly possible that growth rates vary within the districts of Bangladesh according to the length and abundance of rainfall, availability of food, intensity of predation and extremes of temperature.

SIZE AND TEMPORAL DISTRIBUTION OF GRAVID FEMALES

The ovaries of all females in the population samples were closely examined to ascertain the reproductive state, i.e., early oogenesis (minute, immature ova, few in number), later oogenesis (larger, immature ova, relatively abundant), mature (fully formed ova, pigmented, abdominal cavity extended) and depleted (postspawning, few or no ova remaining, oviducts greatly enlarged).

Gravid females comprise a significant preponderance of all females in the population samples examined between 16 May 1982 and 29 June 1982: 93.57%, 100% (5, 6, 9 June), 91.66%, 84.11%, 97.87% and 85.71% (Table 1).

Gravid females are present in the 71-80 mm size-cohort, the 161-170 mm size-cohort and all intervening size-cohorts. It is established, therefore, that individuals between 71-80 mm and 161-170 mm snout-vent length are reproductively mature.

The frequencies of gravid females larger than and smaller than the mean size-cohort of each population examined decline correlatively with the decrease of snout-vent frequencies. Except for the population obtained 5 June 1982 (141-150 mm), the mean size-cohorts of gravid females among the population samples vary from 111-120 mm, 121-130 mm and 91-100 mm.

The reproductive potential of larger females, producing larger egg masses and thereby more abundant larvae, is negated by their prompt removal from the reproductive pools. Females of smaller size produce fewer ova, thus reducing the recruitment potential, given the high level of larval mortality.

In certain, if not all, areas of Bangladesh in which Rana tigrina exists, females are reproductively mature by mid-May and remain so until at least early July. The data do not indicate if Rana tigrina oviposits single or multiple clutches throughout its geographic range or if the frequency of spawning varies regionally. In females from the Districts of Mymensingh and Sylhet the field data suggest that multiple spawning may occur during lengthy and unabated monsoonal seasons. In other districts in which the monsoon is of shorter duration, multiple spawning is not indicated by the data.

The sex-ratios of the populations examined varied thusly (males-females): 51.17 - 48.83%, 45.07 - 56.93%, 84.0 - 16.0%, 59.3 - 40.0%, 67.0 - 33.0%, 40.0 - 60.0%, 52.1 - 47.9%, and 63.0 - 37.0%.

Males are predominant in the larger population samples and females in the smaller. Males emerge before the females after the advent of the monsoons, and establish temporary breeding territories. The ceaseless nocturnal chorusing and intensified breeding colors attract predators and collectors. Thus, the sex-ratio strongly favors males in all population samples obtained from mid-May to late June. The females, emerging later from estivation than males, are voiceless and less spectacularly colored. They are more easily overlooked by predators and collectors. The sex-ratios of the population samples are strongly biased in that collectors seek or are attracted to the males.

The percentage of gravid females of all females examined varied from 38.93% to 98.0% in large population samples (Table 1). The lesser percentage is derived from females perhaps obtained prior to the beginning of the permissible collecting period and retained in holding tanks. The higher percentages indicate that a significant number of reproductively mature females are removed from the breeding populations.

FOOD PREFERENCES

In Bangladesh, a preliminary analysis of the stomach contents of Rana tigrina was undertaken on specimens collected in the Districts of Mymensingh, Chittagong, Noakhali, Sylhet, Khulna, Jessore, Rangpur and Bogra.

One-hundred-ten individuals were examined, ranging in snout-vent length from 33 mm to 140 mm. The mean (42.7%) ranged from 61 mm to 90 mm, followed by 31 mm to 60 mm (31.8%), 91 mm to 120 mm (17.2%), 121 mm to 150 mm (7.2%) and 151 mm to 180 mm (0.9%).

The one-hundred-ten specimens were obtained between 16 September and 13 November 1976 (data obtained from the Faculty of Fisheries, Bangladesh Agriculture University). Air temperature varied from 21.5°C to 30.5°C during the collecting period. Water temperature varied from 19°C to 30°C. All specimens were captured either in aquatic habitats or those characteristically moist throughout the year.

As reported in the study of Rana tigrina near Bombay, India (Issac and Rege, 1975), Coleoptera constitute the greatest volume of prey, followed in decreasing volumes by Orthoptera, Anura, Hymenoptera and Arthropoda (decapod crustacean). Coleopterans were the most frequently encountered organisms in 94 stomachs (16 contained no organisms) followed in decreasing frequencies by Hymenoptera, Orthoptera, Diptera, Lepidoptera and Hemiptera. The dietary elements indicate the abundance of prey species from mid-September until mid-November. The prey species consumed by Rana tigrina at other periods are not documented. In that Rana tigrina is a carnivorous, indiscriminate predator, the diet unquestionably reflects the relative abundance of invertebrates.

In Bangladesh, as well as in India, Rana tigrina is a significant agent of biological control. In those areas in which the populations are stressed, observations indicate that noxious insects and agricultural pests have rapidly increased. The ultimate control of the insects, therefore, may depend upon the use, or the increased use, of insecticides.

TABLE 1

Meristic and Reproductive Characteristics of Rana tigrina
 Obtained in the Districts of Faridpur, Khulna, Kustia, Comilla,
 Mymensingh, Barisal, Sylhet and Chittagong, 16 May-29 June, 1982

<u>Snout-Vent Length in mm</u>	<u>% of Total Males in Size-Cohort</u>	<u>% of Total Gravid Females in Size-Cohort</u>
161 - 170	-	0.1
151 - 160	-	0.6
141 - 150	1.3	3.8
131 - 140	7.0	12.7
121 - 130	14.7	21.3
111 - 120	17.5	24.1
101 - 110	24.1	19.0
91 - 100	23.1	13.1
81 - 90	10.6	4.6
71 - 80	1.2	0.3
61 - 70	0.1	-
Total Males Examined - 960		Total Gravid Females Examined - 821
		Total Females Examined - 915

TABLE 2

Analysis of Stomach Contents of Rana tigrina From
Eight Localities in Bangladesh

<u>Taxonomic Group</u>	<u>Total Number of Items Found in Stomachs</u>	<u>Number of Stomachs</u>	<u>% Volume of Food Items in all Stomachs</u>
Ephemeroptera	1	1	0.020
Odonata	1	1	0.161
Orthoptera	(33)	-	21.158
Tridactylidae	1	1	0.121
Gryllotalpidae	2	1	0.800
Acrididae	2	2	0.242
Gryllidae	28	20	19.995
Dermaptera			
Forficulidae	2	2	0.323
Hemiptera			
S. O. Heteroptera	(8)	-	0.040
Reduviidae	4	1	0.242
Coreidae	1	1	0.040
Pantatomidae	2	2	0.484
S. O. Homoptera	2	1	0.080
Cicadellidae	1	1	0.121
Neuroptera	1	1	0.201
Lepidoptera	(9)	-	2.381

Pyralidae	1	1	0.121
Geometridae	1	1	0.201
"Hairy Caterpillar"	4	3	1.050
Diptera	(21)	-	2.099
Tipulidae	2	2	2.201
Muscidae	14	10	1.456
S. O. Cyclorrapha	5	1	8.242
Hemiptera	(212)	-	8.922
Formicidae	209	35	7.549
Vespidae	3	2	1.131
Coleoptera	(160)	-	34.935
Carabidae	109	55	29.921
Curculionidae	17	7	1.959
Scarabaeidae	22	9	1.745
Staphylinidae	3	3	0.262
Coccinellidae	1	1	0.161
Chrysomellidae	6	8	0.686
Grub	1	1	0.121
Aquatic Beetle (Coleoptera)	1	1	0.080
Annelida	15	3	3.958
Crab (Crustacea Decapoda)			
Complete	1	4	7.109
Fragments	23		

Millipede (Diplopoda)	9	5	1.050
Spider (Arachnida)	6	6	0.686
Snail (Gastropoda)	19	9	2.302
Cypriniformes (Pisces)	2	2	4.039
Anura	3	3	11.391
Plant Material	-	8	-
Rice	2	2	-
Rocks	2	2	-
Mud	-	7	-

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