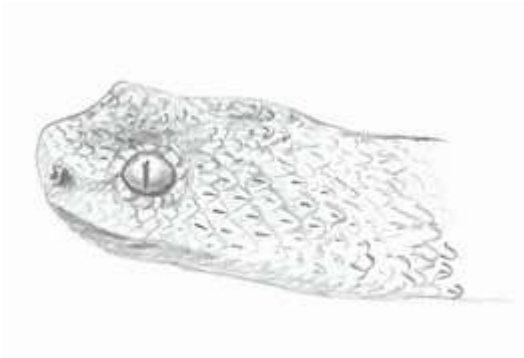
SSN SPECIES SURVIVAL NETWORK

CITES 2004

Mount Kenya Bush Viper
Atheris desaixi

CoP13 Prop. 30: Listing on Appendix II of Mount Kenya Bush Viper (*Atheris desaixi*)
Proposed by Kenya

RECOMMENDATION: SUPPORT ADOPTION OF PROPOSAL



- Restricted range and limited reproduction potential render this snake vulnerable to over-exploitation
- The two known populations are isolated and their habitat is rapidly being destroyed
- The species is sought after by reptile collectors in Europe and North America
- Illegal trade is known to exist
- Collection for export may not be sustainable when coupled with habitat loss

The Mount Kenya bush viper meets the criteria for listing on Appendix II. This large, thick-bodied arboreal viper is found only in the forests of high central Kenya. Only two populations are known, one around Igembe in the northern Nyambeni range, and one at Chuka on the south-eastern side of Mount Kenya (Spawls *et al,* 2002). Both areas, which are not protected, have suffered from extensive habitat degradation due to logging and agricultural activities. The population status of the Mount Kenya bush viper is unknown, but researchers believe it is becoming increasingly rare. Numbers are strongly suspected to be declining due to trade and habitat degradation. The analysis of the listing proposal by IUCN and TRAFFIC concludes that *"It is possible that collection for export has at least a local impact on wild populations and may not be sustainable when coupled with habitat loss and degradation."*

An illegal trade exists, but data is sparse and difficult to obtain. An investigation into reptile trade in Kenya conducted between 2001 and 2002 found the Mount Kenya bush viper was among many species being smuggled out of the country (Reeve/IFAW, 2002). There were shipments of several *Atheris* species to the USA between 1997 and 2000 using fraudulent permits obtained by a foreign national who was later deported. US import statistics for this period record 50 unspecified *Atheris* individuals imported from Kenya in five shipments. Documentation seized in Kenya covering 6 months (Nov 1999-May 2000) shows 27 individuals of *Atheris desaixi* were exported, while only US import data only records 4 unspecified individuals imported during this period. Thus several imports were unrecorded in the US import data, indicating that trade was higher than reported. The Kenyan investigation found this snake to be the third most frequently traded snake. In a seizure of 38 reptiles from Kenyan nationals in November 1999, 17 were Mount Kenya bush vipers. The IUCN/TRAFFIC analysis states that this snake is *" known to be in demand overseas and to feature in international trade."* Individuals claimed to be captive reared are currently (as 3 Oct 2004) being advertised for sale on the internet at US$1,200.

Control of this trade from Kenya is very difficult. Legislation is not adequate since the species is not listed on the Schedule of the Wildlife Act of Kenya. Enforcement is under-resourced and reptiles are not a high priority. Appendix II listing will assist Kenya with controlling the markets. Kenya believes an Appendix III listing will not be sufficient to control the markets and protect the species.

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Kenya Horned Viper
Bitis worthingtoni

CoP13 Prop. 31 (Kenya) Listing on Appendix II of Kenya Horned Viper (*Bitis worthingtoni*)
Proposed by Kenya

RECOMMENDATION: SUPPORT ADOPTION OF PROPOSAL

- Restricted range and low reproductive potential render this snake vulnerable to over-exploitation.
- The status of the species is unknown but it is at risk from trade and habitat loss
- It is in demand by foreign collectors due to its distinctive and unusual features
- Illegal trade is known to exist

The Kenya horned viper meets the criteria for listing in Appendix II. This small viper is one of the most spectacular and unusual of Kenya's endemic species. According to the IUCN/TRAFFIC analysis it "*has a restricted range, appears to be rare and has a low reproductive potential*." It is found in high altitude grassland and scrub along the central rift valley. Its status is unknown, but one expert found it had disappeared from an area in which it was numerous 30 years ago (Ashe, *pers. com*. 2002). Its main habitat is within prime farming land so it is at risk from habitat loss (Spawls *et al.,* 2002). According to the IUCN/TRAFFIC analysis *"It is conceivable that collection for export may not be sustainable, or may be reducing populations to a potentially threatened level."*

An illegal trade exists but data is sparse and difficult to obtain. An investigation into trade conducted in 2001 and 2002 found the Kenya horned viper was the most frequently exported snake (Reeve/IFAW 2002). Fraudulent permits seized in Kenya indicated 37 individuals were exported to Canada (1), Netherlands (4) and the USA (32) between November 1999 and May 2000. US import statistics for November 1997 – May 2000 record 17 unspecified *Bitis* species imported from Kenya in five shipments; none of these were imported during the period covered by the seized documentation. Thus many imports were unrecorded in the US import data, indicating that trade is higher than reported. A survey by German Customs Authorities and the German Scientific Authority found 19 Kenya horned vipers were illegally imported into Germany between May and October 1999. The survey did not cover all German airports and reflected only part of the trade in one year. The IUCN/TRAFFIC analysis confirms that the species is *"in demand by foreign collectors and has been recorded in international trade."* Individuals claimed to captive reared are currently (as of Oct 2004) being advertised for sale on the internet at US$1,200.

Control of this trade from Kenya is very difficult. Legislation is not adequate since the species is not listed on the Schedule of the Wildlife Act of Kenya. Enforcement is under-resourced and reptiles are not a high priority. Appendix II listing will assist Kenya with controlling the markets, particularly in the EU and USA. Kenya believes an Appendix III listing will not be sufficient to control the markets and protect the species.