

### **Project Update: December 2003**

Along with members of the community, talks are on with the Delhi government to employ snake charmers in the forest department. They will be employed to rescue snakes from people's homes. We have spoken to the Chief Minister of Delhi, and she has expressed interest in employing them. Now it is just a question of making this official which could take some time! In any case, the snake charmers have been rescuing snakes from people's homes. Many people still don't know about us so there haven't been too many calls but we do our best, along with snake charmers to release them in the nearby forest.

The snake charmers had their annual festival in which thousands of them gathered at a temple, some 300 km from Delhi to offer prayers to their guru (traditional leader). A panchayat (community meeting) was organised on this occasion, in which the snake charmers came out with a memorandum urging the government to offer them some rehabilitation. They also took a vow never to catch pythons as these are endangered and, if given permission, they will only use cobras for their traditional performances. They also resolved that anyone caught indulging in the snake skins trade would be given severe punishment by the community.

I am now heading for what I consider to be the main thrust of the project: together with a team that includes an ethnobotanist and a herpetologist I will visit over 100 snake charmer villages which are in far flung rural areas. This will really give us a true picture of what is happening to snake charmers across the country. This will take us about three months. This survey work will enable us to prepare a comprehensive rehabilitation plan which will be presented to the government. I am really seeing our report as the first of its kind in India and the main output of this project.