

Sibynophis Subpunctatus (Duméril, Bibron & Duméril, 1854) – A New Record for the State of Telangana, India

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Abstract

Sibynophis subpunctatus (Dumeril, Bibron & Dumeril, 1854) a non venomous snake discovered from the forests of Mahabubnagar district and it forms a new distributional record for the state of Telangana, the 29th state of India. Photographs of the snake is providing for easy identification (**Fig-1**).

Fig-1: *Sibynophis subpunctatus*



Introduction

Sybinophis (Fitzinger, 1843) is an Asiatic genus of the family Sibynophiidae (Zaher et al., 2012). The genus is representing with 9 species mainly distributed in Asia, among them, 4 are representing from India. The genus generally found in hilly areas. The members of the genus has slightly differentiated head from the neck, teeth numerous and closely arranged, body slender and cylindrical with 17 rows of smooth scales, eyes large with round pupil, subcaudals in pairs; rostral broader, oculars-2.

Sibynophis subpunctatus is reported from Central Nallamala hills of Eastern Ghats of Andhra Pradesh (Srinivasulu and Das 2008; Bubesh et al., 2012) and Similipal Biosphere Reserv of Orissa (Dutta et al., 2009). Most of the authors

treated *S. subpunctatus* as a synonym of *S. sagittarius*, but Captain et al (2004) clarified the differences between two species and stated that both are different in terms of morphology and distribution ranges. The former one is found in South India and Sri Lanka, the later one found in Bangladesh and North East India. Even though *S. sagittarius* is a North East Indian species, Sanyal et al., (1993) reported it from east Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh based on the collections of Goffeny.

In the present study, the authors while exploring the Mahabubnagar district of Telangana state for plants, they came across a beautiful snake in Nallamala forests and also swampy area in Veepanagnndla mandal. After a critical study it is identified as *Sibynophis subpunctatus*. A through perusal of literature (Smith, 1943; Sanyal et al., 1993; Sharma, 2003; Srinivasulu and Das, 2008; Whitaker and Captain, 2004) has revealed that it was not recorded from any part of Telangana state and forms a new distributional record for the state.

Sibynophis subpunctatus (Duméril, Bibron & Duméril, 1854)

Common Name: Black-headed snake or Dumeril's Black headed snake

A non venomous, slender, smooth-scaled snake. Head not distinct from neck, scarcely broader than neck. Eye large with round pupil. Tail long, gradually tapering. Maxillary teeth 42-48. Oviparous.

Scalation

Preocular-1, Postoculars-2, Temporals-2, Upper labials-9 in them 3rd, 4th and 5th touching the eye. Middle of the body with 17 rows of scales (17:17:17). Body scales smooth. Ventral scales 167 and 172. Anal divided and Subcaudals paired, 62 and 73.

Size and Colour

Length of the body is 28-30cm, head black, tail brown above. A series of tiny black dots run along the vertebral line and sides of the body. Sides of the body grey. Head black with pale yellow markings. Head and nape dark brown or black, with a large oval patch and two broad yellow ones bordering the dark colour of the nape. Neck has pale yellow or white collar. Ventral scales greenish-yellow; belly scales with a black dot on each side.

Habit and Habitat

Terrestrial and diurnal. Commonly found in leaf litter and swampy areas in hills. Feeds on small lizards and scinks; juveniles feeds on termites and larvae. Generally confused with the venomous Slender coral snake which has a coral red belly and two distinct black rings on its tail.

Distribution

World: Sri Lanka

India: Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal

Telangana: Mahabubnagar district (Nallamala forests - Umamaheswaram, Veepanagandla mandal)

Status: Vulnerable due to habitat loss (Sharma, 2007), road kills, merciless killing by human beings due it looks like slender coral snake, but according to IUCN categories it is treated as Lower Risk near Threatened (LR-nt) (Bubesh et al., 2012).

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