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A new rock dwelling *Hemidactylus* (Squamata: Gekkonidae) from Chhattisgarh, India

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Abstract

A distinct new species of gecko of the genus *Hemidactylus* is described from the Kanker district of Chhattisgarh State, east-central India. This large-sized (SVL average 81.33 ± 13.40 to at least 98.0 mm) *Hemidactylus* is characterized by a dorsum with small granules, intermixed with 10–12 rows of irregularly arranged, slightly larger, rounded, weakly-keeled tubercles at midbody; 10–12 and 13–15 subdigital lamellae on the first and fourth digits, respectively, of both manus and pes; a single enlarged postcloacal tubercle on either side of the tail; 10–12 femoral pores on each thigh separated by 5–8 poreless scales; 12–14 supralabials and 10–12 infralabials.

Key words: *Hemidactylus yajurvedi* sp. nov., *H. aaronbaueri*, cryptic species, Chhattisgarh, India

Introduction

With over 121 species distributed across the tropics and subtropics worldwide, *Hemidactylus* is one of the most species-rich gekkonid genera (Uetz & Hosek 2015). *Hemidactylus* is one of the most speciose lizard genera in India, with 25 nominate species distributed across a range of habitats (Uetz & Hosek 2015). Despite their dominant presence across the subcontinent, these geckos remain poorly known (Agarwal *et al.* 2011; Mirza & Sanap 2014). The recent past has seen a significant increase in knowledge on Indian *Hemidactylus*, mainly in the form of new species descriptions, taxonomic revisions and distributional records (Zug *et al.* 2007; Giri 2008; Giri and Bauer 2008; Giri *et al.* 2009; Mahony 2009, 2011; Gaikwad *et al.* 2010; Agarwal *et al.* 2011; Bauer *et al.* 2012; Pal *et al.* 2013), with the broad phylogenetic relationships of the Indian radiation elucidated through molecular data (Bansal and Karanth 2010; Bauer *et al.* 2010a,b).

Much of the recent knowledge on *Hemidactylus* is based on investigations carried out in biodiversity rich regions like the Western and Eastern Ghats. We still know little about *Hemidactylus* from other regions of India, though these geckos are common across their range and well represented in collections. While investigating the collections at the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), Kolkata, India, we came across specimens labelled as *Hemidactylus giganteus*, collected from Kanker district of then Madhya Pradesh (now Chhattisgarh) state in 1979. A cursory examination of these specimens revealed that the dorsal pholidosis in these specimens was composed of granular scales, intermixed with rounded, enlarged tubercles. *Hemidactylus giganteus* is the only large sized Indian gecko without any tubercles on the back or tail, and these specimens were probably wrongly assigned to this species due to their large size and superficial similarity in colouration

We suspected that the specimens in the ZSI collection from Kanker represented an undescribed species, and as the collection data linked to these specimens was precise, we were able to visit these areas and collect additional