A new species of Rhinophis Hemprich, 1820 (Reptilia: Serpentes: Uropeltidae) from Rakwana massif, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

A new species of Rhinophis, Rhinophis erangaviraji sp. nov., is described, the tenth species of the genus known from Sri Lanka. The new species is readily distinguished from all other congeners by its colour pattern and scalation. Morphometric analysis supports the distinction of the new species from the superficially similar R. blythii. The new species is known only from the Rakwana massif, where it has been collected in shady areas, within loose soil.

Key words: new species, Rhinophis, Rhinophis erangaviraji sp. nov., shieldtail, snakes, Sri Lanka, taxonomy, Uropeltidae

Introduction

There are currently twelve recognized species of the uropeltid snake genus Rhinophis Hemprich, of which nine are endemic to Sri Lanka and three to India (Das, 2001; McDiarmid et al., 1999). Of the Sri Lankan species, R. dorsimaculatus Deraniyagala, 1941, R. oxyrhynchus (Schneider, 1801), R. porrectus Wall, 1921, R. punctatus Müller, 1832, and R. oxyrhynchus are found in the Dry Zone (Deraniyagala, 1955, 1975; de Silva, 1980; de Silva, 1990). R. porrectus Wall, 1921 has variably been treated as a junior synonym of R. punctatus (Smith, 1943; Deraniyagala, 1955; Gans, 1966) or a distinct, valid species (Wall, 1921; Taylor, 1950; de Silva, 1980; Mahendra, 1984; McDiarmid et al., 1999; de Silva, 2006; Somaweera, 2006). R. dorsimaculatus, is known only from the original material, although a picture of a specimen closely resembling this species has recently been published by Somaweera (2006).

Rhinophis blythii Kelaart, 1853, R. drummondhayi Wall, 1921, R. homolepis (Hemprich, 1820), R. philippinus (Cuvier, 1829) and R. tricoloratus Deraniyagala, 1975, are found in the wet zone and the central