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A new species of cat snake (Reptilia: Serpentes: Colubridae: *Boiga*) from dry forests of eastern Peninsular India

GERNOT VOGEL^{1,3} & S.R. GANESH²

¹Society for Southeast Asian Herpetology, Im Sand 3, D-69115 Heidelberg, Germany. E-mail: gernot.vogel@t-online.de

²Chennai Snake Park, Chennai 600 022, Tamil Nadu, India. E-mail: snakeranglerr@gmail.com

³Corresponding author. E-mail: gernot.vogel@t-online.de

Abstract

A new species of cat snake, related to *Boiga beddomei* (Wall, 1909), is described from the dry forests of eastern Peninsular India. It occupies a large geographic range from Berhampore (type locality), near the River Mahanadi in the northeast to Kaigal near the southern Eastern Ghats in the southwest. The new species is diagnosed by having the following combination of characters: 19 dorsal scale rows at midbody, a high number of ventral scales for the genus *Boiga* (248–259), a yellowish-green dorsal colouration with numerous faint black bands, an uniform, unpatterned yellow-coloured venter and a relatively short tail (0.180–0.200 of the total length).

Key words: *Boiga flaviviridis* sp. nov., *B. beddomei*, *B. ceylonensis*, Berhampore, Sriharikota, Kaigal, India

Introduction

The nocturnal, arboreal, rear-fanged colubrine snake genus *Boiga* Fitzinger, 1826 is currently represented in Peninsular India by six species (Das 2002; Daniel 2002; Whitaker & Captain 2008), i.e. *B. trigonata* (Schneider, 1802), *B. forsteni* (Duméril, Bibron & Duméril, 1854), *B. ceylonensis* (Günther, 1858), *B. nuchalis* (Günther, 1875), *B. dightoni* (Boulenger, 1894) and *B. beddomei* (Wall, 1909). Of these, the latter four are largely characteristic of the wet hill-forest tracts of India's Western Ghats, and, in the case of *B. ceylonensis* and *B. beddomei*, the wet-zone of central, hilly Sri Lanka as well (Das 2002; Daniel 2002; Whitaker & Captain 2008; Das & De Silva 2005 [part]). Smith (1943) synonymised *B. beddomei*, *B. nuchalis* and *B. andamanensis* with *B. ceylonensis*. *Boiga andamanensis* is an allopatric, valid species endemic to the Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal. For unknown reasons, Smith disregarded three diagnostic characters viz. numbers of midbody scale rows, ventrals and subcaudals. Recent works considered all these taxa to be valid species (Das 2002; Das & De Silva 2005; Whitaker & Captain 2008), a view that we also follow here. Two additional species, *B. barnesii* (Günther 1869) and *B. ranawanei* Samarawickrama, Samarawickrama, Wijesena & Orlov, 2005 are endemic to the wet zone of central, hilly Sri Lanka (Das & De Silva 2005; Samarawickrama *et al.* 2005). *Boiga ranawanei* is considered to be an objective junior synonym of *B. beddomei* after Manamendra-Arachchi & Pethiyagoda (2007).

Sivakumar & Manakadan (2007), despite noting a “greenish” dorsum, reported a range extension of ‘*B. beddomei*’ (sic) based on BNHS 3343 from Sriharikota Is., off the Coramandel coast of southern India. Ganesh & Asokan (2010) while writing their herpetological catalogue of Madras Museum, in the accounts of one of its specimens “MAD 1913 *Dendrophis pictus* from Udayagiri, Nellore” first recognized the distinctive nature of BNHS 3343 from *B. beddomei* from the same general area. They also noted the potential conspecificity between MAD 1913 and BNHS 3343 and referred to them as “*Boiga* sp.” Thus, Sivakumar & Manakadan's (2007) record was removed from the chresonymy of *B. beddomei* sensu Wall (1909). Ganesh & Asokan (2010) commented on the unresolved situation in Sri Lanka following Manamendra-Arachchi & Pethiyagoda's (2007) synonymisation of *B. ranawanei* with *B. beddomei* despite small differences in scalation, which has increased confusion regarding