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A new species of gecko of the genus *Cnemaspis* Strauch, 1887 from the Western Ghats, India

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Abstract

A new species of the gekkonid genus *Cnemaspis* is described from the lateritic plateau of the northern Western Ghats of Maharashtra, western India. The new species is diagnosed by the following suite of characters: small sized *Cnemaspis*, SVL less than 35 mm (21.52–33.65). Dorsal scales on trunk heterogeneous, granular scales intermixed with large smooth scales and large keeled conical tubercles. Spine-like tubercles absent on flank. Two pairs of postmentals, inner postmentals separated by a single enlarged chin shield. Ventral scales on trunk smooth, imbricate, 26–28 scales across the belly between the lowest rows of dorsal scales. Subdigital scensors smooth, entire, unnotched; lamellae under digit IV of pes 17–20. Males with four femoral pores on each thigh and lacking pre-cloacal pores. Median row of sub-caudals smooth, imbricate and not enlarged. The present discovery highlights the need for dedicated herpetofaunal explorations in the northern Western Ghats to ascertain the exact diversity and distribution of *Cnemaspis* in India to elucidate the apparent disjunct distribution of the genus in the country.

Key words: new species, Gekkonidae, *Cnemaspis*, taxonomy, Kaas plateau, Western Ghats, India

Introduction

The gekkonid genus *Cnemaspis* Strauch, 1887 which includes mainly diurnal and/or crepuscular species is represented in tropical as well as subtropical Asia and tropical Africa with at least 103 species (Uetz 2013) and in India by 21 species (Venugopal 2010, Giri *et al.* 2009). Though treated as monophyletic group at present, doubts have been raised by several authors of presence of distinct monophyletic groups (African, South-Asian, Southeast Asian) within *Cnemaspis* (Bauer *et al.* 2007, Das & Bauer 2000, Gamble *et al.* 2012, Wood *et al.* 2013). In India, members of this genus show a disjunct distribution with the greatest diversity in the Western Ghats, a few species in the southeastern part of the peninsula and a single species in northeast India (Giri *et al.* 2009). This disjunct distribution may likely be result of the scarcity of surveys given that some species of *Cnemaspis* occupy narrow microhabitats within a landscape. At least 17 species of this genus occur to the Western Ghats, with most restricted to the southern Western Ghats, and only a single recently described endemic in the northern Western Ghats (Giri *et al.* 2009). The group is in need of taxonomic revision, and recent studies by Wickramasinghe & Munindrasa (2007) and Manamendra-Arachchi *et al.* (2007) addressed a few issues relevant mostly to Sri Lankan lineages, while only partially addressing issues relevant to Indian populations. Giri *et al.* (2009) have provided a summary of the present taxonomic scenario of this genus in India. In the Western Ghats, the northern most locality record for the genus *Cnemaspis* appears to be Phansad Wildlife Sanctuary in Raighad District, Maharashtra and only two species are known from the state of Maharashtra of which one was described by Giri *et al.* (2009) and the other population previously referred to as *C. "kandiana"* (Kelaart) from southern Maharashtra may be attributed to *C.*

A detailed systematic revision of Indian *Cnemaspis* is needed with support of molecular data and comparison with relevant type material. Due to the fact that Indian *Cnemaspis* are the least studied among other gekkonids in the country with respect to their taxonomic status, we urge that any taxonomic amendments with reference to this genus must be done only after comparison of relevant material, and especially type specimens, to avoid erroneous amendments.

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