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Occurrence of the Sri Lankan Flying Snake, *Chrysopelea* cf. *taprobanica* (Smith 1943) in Tamil Nadu, India

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"Flying Snakes" in the genus *Chrysopelea* are arboreal colubrids. The genus comprises five species (Uetz and Hošek 2013) of which two, *C. ornata* (Shaw 1802) and *C. taprobanica* Smith 1943, have been recorded in India. The Golden Flying Snake (*C. ornata*) ranges through northern India and much of southeastern Asia to the Philippines, with a disjunct population recognized at the subspecific level in Sri Lanka. *Chrysopelea taprobanica* was considered a color variant of *C. ornata* until recognized as a distinct species by Smith (1943) and was believed to be endemic to Sri Lanka (Taylor 1950; Deraniyagala 1955; Pyron et al. 2013). However, Guptha et al. (2015) recently documented the presence of the species in the Seshachalam Biosphere Reserve in the Eastern Ghats of India (Fig. 1). Herein we provide two additional records of *C.* cf. *taprobanica*, one each from the Western and Eastern Ghats.

At 1530 h on 19 March 2016, R. Kumar rescued a live snake (Fig. 2) from a human habitation in the foothills of the Western Ghats in Kalampalayam, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu (10.928512N, 76.82129E; elevation 518 m asl; Fig. 1). The site is within the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. Because we suspected that the snake was *C. taprobanica*, we recorded measurements and scale counts before taking voucher photographs and releasing the snake at the site of capture. We counted dorsal scale rows one head length behind the neck, at approximately midbody, and one head length anterior to the vent. We counted ventrals as in Dowling (1951). A comparison (Table 1) with recently recorded (Guptha et al. 2015) and literature data (Smith 1943; Constable 1949) suggests that this individual was *C. taprobanica*. However, in the absence of molecular data and in light of variation in only one scale character (see below), we conservatively refer to this snake as *C.* cf. *taprobanica*.

On 14 January 2015, Arul sighted a similar snake (Fig. 3) in an area of riparian and dry deciduous forest in the Javadu Hills of the Eastern Ghats (12.581463N, 78.861228E; elevation 657 m asl; Fig. 1), approximately 125 km south of the previous record (Guptha et al. 2015). The sighting was

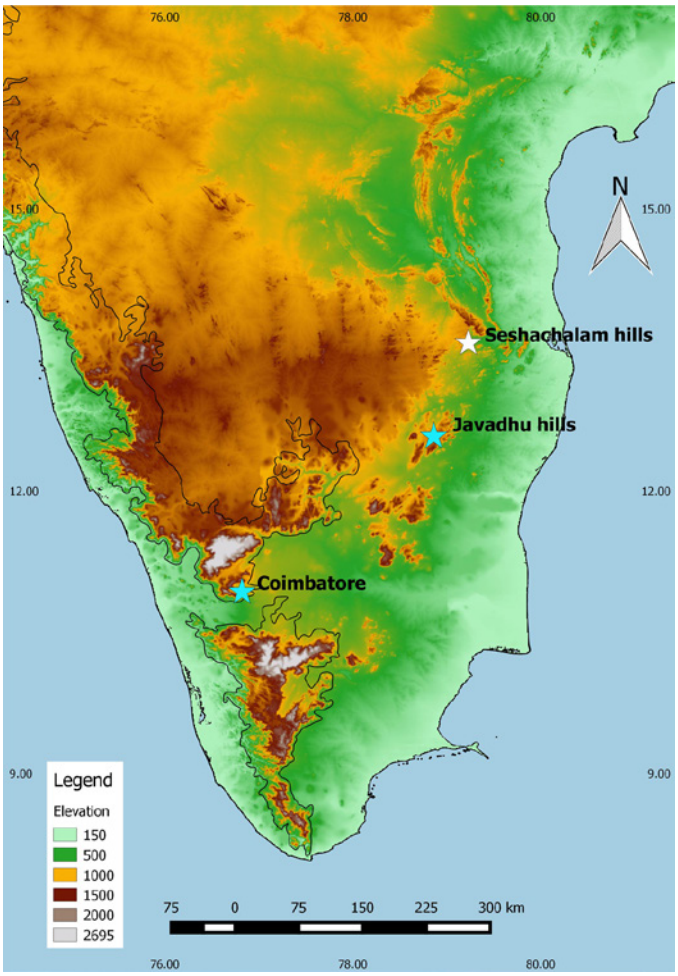

Fig. 1. Known localities for the Sri Lankan Flying Snake (*Chrysopelea taprobanica*) in India. The previously known location (white star) is in the Seshachalam Biosphere Reserve in the Eastern Ghats (Guptha et al. 2015) and the additional locations (blue stars) reported herein are in the Javadu Hills of the Eastern Ghats and Coimbatore of the Western Ghats.

Fig. 2. A Sri Lankan Flying Snake (*Chrysopelea cf. taprobanica*) rescued from a human habitation in Coimbatore, India. Photograph by Naveen Joseph.

Table 1. Comparison of the snake reported herein (*Chrysopelea* cf. *taprobanica* from Coimbatore) and those identified as *C. taprobanica* and described by Guptha et al. (2015) and Constable (1949).

Character	Current work	Source Guptha et al. (2015)	Constable (1949)
Dorsal scale rows	17:17:13	17:17:15	17
Ventrals	202	201	208
Subcaudals	106	106	120
Supralabials	9	9	9
Supralabials entering the eye	4, 5, and 6	4, 5, and 6	4, 5, and 6
Loreals	1	1	1
Preoculars	1	1	1
Postoculars	2	2	2
Temporals	2+2	2+2	2+2
Infralabials	8	—	—
Snout-vent length (mm)	501	589	560
Tail length (mm)	190	223	225
Bands on body	56	57	—
Bands on tail	26	14	—
Dorsal color	Olive with black bars	Olive with black bars	Olive with black bands

Fig. 3. A Sri Lankan Flying Snake (*Chrysopelea cf. taprobanica*) encountered in the Javadu Hills, Tamil Nadu, India. Photograph by Arul Vengatesan.

opportunistic, so the snake was not collected and no data were recorded. Consequently, we could not confirm its identity, but color and pattern suggest that it was *C.* cf. *taprobanica.*

The current record from Coimbatore matches previous descriptions of *C. taprobanica* except for dorsal scale rows of 17:17:13 (vs. 17:17:15) and a divided cloacal scale (vs. undivided; Guptha et al. 2015; Smith 1943 — note that an undivided cloacal was the character Smith used to differentiate *C. taprobanica* from *C. ornata*). The snake described herein might be aberrant or the population in the Western Ghats might vary from those found elsewhere. This would have to be determined by examining more samples.

Although Guptha et al. (2015) claimed the first confirmed record of *C. taprobanica* from India, they overlooked earlier records in Constable (1949), who reported the species in "Madras" (present-day Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh). Most recently, Somaweera et al. (2015) revalidated the records of Constable (1949) and others. Three specimens labeled as *C. taprobanica* were examined, and one in the Naturhistorisches Museum Wien (NMW 27287:34) was confirmed to be *C. taprobanica*. Unfortunately, except for the record in Guptha et al. (2015), we do not know the precise localities for any other specimens. Nevertheless, the two records from Tamil Nadu suggest that the species occupies a broad geographic area; and we suspect that *C. taprobanica* is widespread in the Eastern Ghats. The new record of *C.* cf. *taprobanica* from the Western Ghats further indicates that the distribution includes the Western Ghats. Possible explanations for the apparently broad range of this species in India include: (1) it has always been present but overlooked because it is either rare or cryptic; (2) it has dispersed recently (although this would appear to be unlikely); or (3) its range is expanding due to human mediation (unlikely, but not impossible). More fieldwork will be necessary to resolve questions regarding the taxonomic status of these snakes and to determine the actual status of the species' distribution in India.

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