



# First Record of an Annulated Seasnake, *Hydrophis cyanocinctus* (Daudin 1803), from the Surat District, South Gujarat, India

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The Annulated Seasnake (*Hydrophis cyanocinctus*) is a venomous viviparous snake that occurs along the entire coast of India (Fig. 1) within a broader distribution along coastal regions from the Persian Gulf to Japan and the Indo-Australian Archipelago (Whitaker and Captain 2008; Rezaie-Atagholipour et al. 2016). *Hydrophis cyanocinctus* generally inhabits shallow coastal waters, where it is often accidentally caught by prawn trawlers (Das 2006). Unlike many sea snakes, *H. cyanocinctus* can crawl slowly on land (Whitaker and Captain 2008).

During a field survey at 1322 h on 22 December 2018, we found a dead but intact Annulated Seasnake (Fig. 2)

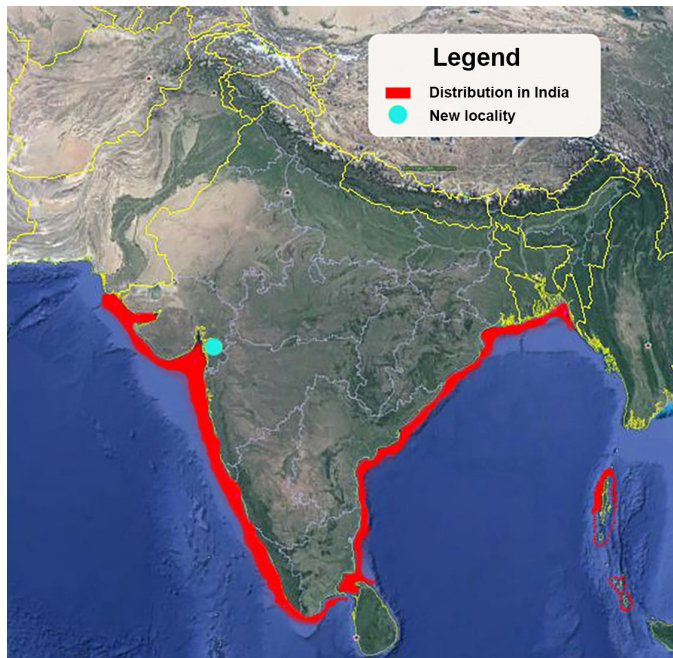
washed ashore at Sulatanabad on Dumas Beach of the Surat District, South Gujarat, India (21°04'45"N 72°42'55"E). This is the first record of this species from South Gujarat and only the second record from Gujarat State; the first record was from the Jamnagar District in the Saurashtra Region of Gujarat (Chandrasekar et al. 2018), which is in northwestern Gujarat >500 km from the Surat District.

The adult female measured 1,264.5 mm SVL and tail length 118.1 mm. Dorsal scales were in 30:41:39 rows behind the head, at midbody, and anterior to the vent, respectively. Ventrals numbered 353 and subcaudals 53.

Daniel (2002) stated that no information on the diet of this species existed. However, snakes kept at the Madras (now Chennai) Aquarium are fed chopped fish. Whitaker and Captain (2008) indicated that these snakes feed on fish and eels. According to a more recent study in the Iranian Hara (Mangrove) Protected Area (Rezaie-Atagholipour et al. 2013), 27 of 35 prey items consumed by 19 of 34 snakes containing intact or partially digested prey included four species of gobiid fish, with all but one fish a mudskipper (subfamily Oxudercinae). The snake that we found had two freshly consumed mudskippers in its stomach.

Whitaker and Captain (2008) stated that this species is uncommon in Indian coastal regions; however, Desai (2017) listed it as a widely distributed common species along the coastline in Gujarat. Although I have seen 40–50 seasnakes caught in nets or trawls, all were Common Seasnakes (*Hydrophis schistosus*) and none were *H. cyanocinctus*.

This species is listed as being of Least Concern on the IUCN Red List (Rasmussen et al. 2010) despite the threat posed by trawl fisheries. However, marine life along the Surat coast also is seriously threatened by pollution generated by major coastal industries and toxic wastes released into estuaries (e.g., Parmar 2018), suggesting that the long-term sustainability of seasnake populations in this region is anything but assured.



**Fig 1.** Distribution of the Annulated Sea Snake (*Hydrophis cyanocinctus*) in India showing the new locality in Dumas, Surat District, Gujarat.



**Fig 2.** A dead but intact Annulated Seasnake (*Hydrophis cyanocinctus*) washed ashore at Sulatanabad on Dumas Beach of the Surat District, South Gujarat, India. Photograph by the author.

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