



Range Extension of Khaire’s Black Shieldtail, *Melanophidium khairei* (Gower, Giri, Captain, and Wilkinson 2016), to Sirsi, Karnataka, India

Omkar Pai¹, Amatya Sharma², and Roozbeh Gazdar³

¹Karnataka Forest Department, Wildlife Research & Training Centre, Dandeli, Karnataka 581325, India (omcar4wildlife@gmail.com)

²#101, Pushpjiyothi, SRR Colony, Mahadevpura Bengaluru, Karnataka 560016, India (conservewithme@gmail.com)

³9B, Gool-Dhun-Abad, SV Road, Jogeshwari (W), Mumbai, Maharashtra 400102, India (roozbehgazdar@gmail.com)

The genus *Melanophidium*, which is endemic to the forests of the Western Ghats in peninsular India, was erected by Günther (1864) to accommodate the Uropeltidae with a mental groove and palatal teeth. By 1871, three species were assigned to the genus: *M. wynaudense* (Beddome 1864), *M. bilineatum* Beddome 1870, and *M. punctatum* Beddome 1871. In 2016, Gower et al. described a new species, *M. khairei*, after reassessing specimens previously identified as *M. punctatum*. The distribution of *M. khairei* was estimated to extend from the northern Western Ghats to southernmost Maharashtra, Goa, and northern Karnataka (Gower et al. 2016).

At 1923 h on 6 July 2018, we encountered a *Melanophidium* sp. at Navanagere, Sirsi, Karnataka (14.5685 N, 74.9552 E; elev. 611 m asl), in a mixed plantation of areca nut, coffee, and black pepper. The snake (Fig. 1) was photographed and scales counted before release. Based on the presence of a short, dorsoventrally compressed terminal scute,

the individual was identified as Khaire’s Black Shieldtail, *M. khairei* (KUDA 13989). We subsequently encountered an additional individual on 3 August 2018, at Vaddi Ghat (14.61490 N, 74.59852 E) at an aerial distance of approximately 38 km west, and another on 30 June 2020 (KUDA 13990), at Bhairumbe (14.70058 N, 74.83128 E) at an aerial distance of around 28 km north of the first location.

Our findings extend the range of *M. khairei* to Sirsi, Uttara Kannada, Karnataka. The location in Navanagere is the southernmost record for the species, at an aerial distance of approximately 90 km south of the previously recorded southernmost site in Verle, Goa.

Acknowledgments

We thank Varad B. Giri and Shikhara A. Bhat for valuable input, discussions, and editing of this note. We also thank Suhas Hegde at TREC for accompanying us during the survey.



Figure 1. Khaire’s Black Shieldtail (*Melanophidium khairei*) from Navanagere, Sirsi, Uttara Kannada, Karnataka, India. Detail: Tail showing the short, dorsoventrally compressed terminal scute. Photographs by Omkar Pai.

Literature Cited

- Beddome, R.H. 1864. Description of new species of the family *Uropeltidae* from southern India, with notes on other little-known species. *Annals of the Magazine of Natural History* 13: 177–180.
- Beddome, R.H. 1870. Descriptions of new reptiles from the Madras Presidency. *Madras Monthly Journal of Medicine and Science* 2: 169–176.
- Beddome, R.H. 1871. Descriptions of new reptiles from the Madras Presidency. *Madras Monthly Journal of Medicine and Science* 4: 401–404.
- Gower D.J., V.B. Giri, A. Captain, and M. Wilkinson. 2016. A reassessment of *Melanophidium* Günther, 1864 (Squamata: Serpentes: *Uropeltidae*) from the Western Ghats of peninsular India, with the description of a new species. *Zootaxa* 4085: 481–503. <https://doi.org/10.11646/zootaxa.4085.4.2>.
- Günther, A.C.L.G. 1864. *Reptiles of British India*. Robert Hardwicke (for the Ray Society), London, UK.