



Evidence for a Population of Eastern Bronzebacks, *Dendrelaphis* cf. *proarchos* (Wall 1909), in Western Peninsular India

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Snakes in the genus *Dendrelaphis* have an extensive distribution from Pakistan in the west, to the northern and eastern coasts of Australia in the east and south, and to southern China in the north (Ziegler and Vogel 1999). These snakes are slender, diurnally active, predominantly arboreal, and feed mainly on lizards and amphibians. *Dendrelaphis proarchos* inhabits Northeast India, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, and China (Uetz et al. 2025).

Dendrelaphis proarchos is very similar to the Painted Bronzeback (*D. pictus*) in appearance but was described by Wall (1909, 1910) as a distinct taxon on the basis of its undivided cloacal scale. Considering the undivided cloacal taxonomically insignificant, Smith (1943) synonymized *D. proarchos* with *D. pictus*. In the latest review of this complex by Vogel and Van Rooijen (2011), the morphological features of *D. pictus* populations from Northeast India and adjacent Myanmar were evaluated and found to differ substantially from populations of *D. pictus* occurring farther east. As a result, those authors resurrected the name *D. proarchos* for the populations in the Indo-Burmese zoogeographic region. Additional research (Biakzuala et al. 2022) based on molecular and morphological data validated that decision.

At about 1230 h on 31 July 2022, a snake rescuer from the Wildlife Welfare Association (hereafter WWA) rescued a snake identified as *Dendrelaphis* cf. *proarchos* (Fig. 1) based on morphometric and morphological characters from Thane-Mulund, Maharashtra, India (19.18422, 72.95331; elev. 7 m asl). The area is bordered by Yeoor Hills of Sanjay Gandhi National Park, which is known for its diverse wildlife. This snake died a day later. A photo voucher has been deposited in the Zoological Reference Collection, Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, National University of Singapore, under accession number [ZRC(IMG) 2.701a-f] and the identity of the snake was confirmed by G. Vogel. A second snake identified as *Dendrelaphis* cf. *proarchos* was rescued from an autorickshaw in Thane (19.18908, 72.96758) at 1440 h on

9 April 2023. That individual was photographed and released in a forested area.

In India, *Dendrelaphis proarchos* is known to occur primarily in Northeast India (Arunachal Pradesh, Bengal, Assam, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Sikkim) (Fig. 2). A recent record of what was assumed to be a human-mediated intro-



Figure 1. An Eastern Bronzeback (*Dendrelaphis* cf. *proarchos*) from Thane, Maharashtra, in western Peninsular India. Dorsal view showing the slender, elongated body and uniform dorsal coloration (top), frontal view highlighting the bright red tongue (lower left), and a lateral view of the head showing the distinct postocular stripe extending well beyond the angle of the jaw (lower right). Photographs courtesy of the Wildlife Welfare Association.

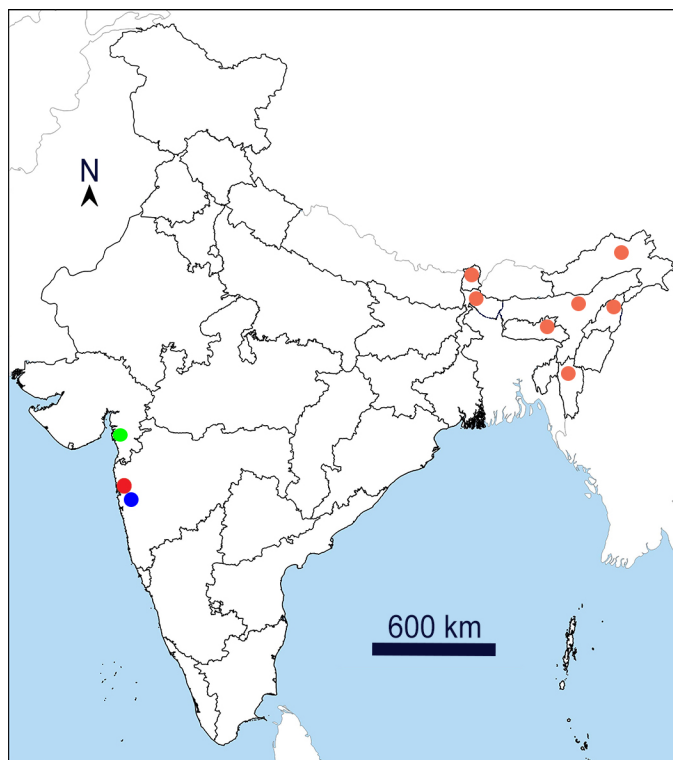


Figure 2. Distribution of Eastern Bronzebacks (*Dendrelaphis cf. proarchos*) in India. Previously documented records in Northeast India are indicated by orange dots, a presumably human-mediated introduction in Surat, Gujarat by a green dot, records of atypical *Dendrelaphis* not identified to species in Mumbai by a red dot, and the new record in Thane, Maharashtra by a blue dot.

duction in Surat, Gujarat in western India was documented by Parmar et al. (2024), and Puranik et al. (2025) reported the presence of “atypical” Bronzebacks, including snakes that appear to be *D. cf. proarchos*. Because *D. tristis* historically has been the only species of *Dendrelaphis* reported from western India, rescuers and observers might well have misidentified *D. cf. proarchos* as *D. tristis* due to the similarity in general appearance.

Although initially suspected to be isolated incidents of human-mediated dispersal (Parmar et al. 2024), the recent records from Mumbai, Thane, and Gujarat are suggestive of at least one possibly naturally occurring population of *D. cf. proarchos* in western peninsular India. If so, this would dramatically expand the known range of the species. However, to conclusively determine the taxonomic status of these snakes,

further investigations incorporating molecular phylogenetic analyses are necessary. However, until such data become available, we tentatively regard these individuals as part of a naturally occurring but previously undocumented population of *Dendrelaphis cf. proarchos* in western peninsular India.

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