



First Record of Forsten's Catsnake, *Boiga forsteni* (Duméril, Bibron, and Duméril 1854), in Himachal Pradesh: Extending the Known Range in Northern India

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The colubrid snakes of the genus *Boiga* Fitzinger 1826 are represented by 37 species, 17 of which occur in India (Uetz et al. 2025). Two species, the Many-banded Catsnake, *Boiga multifasciata* (Blyth 1861), and the Common Catsnake, *Boiga trigonata* (Schneider 1802), have been recorded in Himachal Pradesh (Saikia et al. 2007; Sharma and Sidhu 2016).

Forsten's Catsnake, *Boiga forsteni* (Duméril, Bibron, and Duméril 1854), occurs in India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Within India, it has been recorded in Sikkim, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, southern

Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, and Telangana (Smith 1943; Whitaker and Captain 2008; Vamdev et al. 2019; Uetz et al. 2025). This nocturnal species inhabits tree hollows, abandoned nests, and leaf tangles on branches, and feeds on lizards, birds (including domestic chickens) and their eggs, bats, and other small mammals (Whitaker and Captain 2008; Mohapatra et al. 2009).

The Renuka Wildlife Sanctuary (4.03 km²; elev. 640–950 m asl) is situated in the catchment of the Giri River in the outer ranges of the western Himalayas near Dadahu, close to Nahan Town in the Sirmaur District of Himachal



Figure 1. Habitat of Forsten's Catsnake (*Boiga forsteni*) in vegetation around Renuka Lake in the Renuka Wildlife Sanctuary near Dadahu, Sirmaur District, Himachal Pradesh, India. Photograph by Virender Sharma.

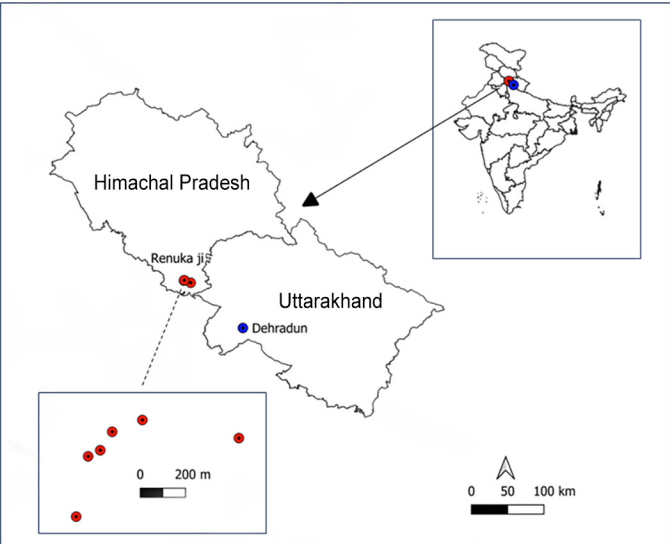


Figure 2. Distribution of Forsten’s Catsnake (*Boiga forsteni*) in the Renuka Wildlife Sanctuary near Dadahu, Sirmaur District, Himachal Pradesh, India. The previously recorded northernmost locality was in Dehradun District, Uttarakhand, India, 107 km SE of the new records.

Pradesh. This area marks the northern limit of Sal (*Shorea robusta*) forests, which transition into subtropical Pine (*Pinus roxburghii*) forests at higher elevations. The vegetation around Renuka Lake (Fig. 1), which is the habitat of *Boiga forsteni* in the sanctuary, consists predominantly of dry mixed deciduous forest (Champion and Seth 1968) with patches of pure Sal and mixed deciduous species. The Renuka Wetland, located at the heart of the sanctuary, is the largest natural freshwater lake in Himachal Pradesh (Singh 2008).

The northernmost limits of the species in India were thought to be in Dehradun, Pauri, and Nainital Districts of Uttarakhand at elevations of ~ 900 m asl (Husain and

Ray 1995). However, the only specific locality record from Uttarakhand was from a male specimen (ZSIK 16395) collected from Kaladhungi (393 m asl) in Nainital District. A second specific locality of *Boiga forsteni* from Uttarakhand was recorded by Hussain and Das (2017) on 7 July 2013 in the Mundal Forest Camp, Chilla Range of the Rajaji Tiger Reserve (29.952781, 78.263152; elev. 300 m asl). We herein present new locality records in the Renuka Wildlife Sanctuary, Himachal Pradesh, which extends the northernmost limits of the species’ range (Fig. 2).

From 2018 to 2024, we recorded eight live sightings and one roadkilled *Boiga forsteni* (Table 1; Fig. 2). The roadkilled specimen was identified as *Boiga forsteni* based on the following combination of characteristics (Fig. 3): long, slender body with a triangular head and a distinct neck; body brown with distinct black and white alternating irregular transverse markings, giving the forebody a checkered appearance; a black mark from the neck to the frontal accompanied by comma-shaped black spots on either side of the neck; black postocular stripes running from behind the eyes to the angles of the jaw and onto the neck; small black spots present on the sides of the ventrals; supralabials light brownish, infralabials whitish, both with some small black markings; chin scales are whitish; eyes round with golden-brown irises and vertical black pupils; vertebral scale rows enlarged; rostral visible from above; frontal slightly longer than wide and widest anteriorly; nostrils between two nasals; one loreal broad at the base; one preocular on each side reaching the upper surface of the head; two unequal postoculars; temporals 3 + 4; 10 supralabials with 4–6 touching the eye; 13 infralabials; anterior and posterior chin shields almost equal in size; 267 ventrals; undivided cloacal scale; 108 paired subcaudals; and midbody scale rows 27–29–17. Photographic vouchers have

Table 1. Records of Forsten’s Catsnake (*Boiga forsteni*) in Himachal Pradesh, India.

No.	Coordinates (elevation)	Date	Remarks
1.	30.60916, 77.44972 (683 m asl)	18 May 2018	Individual observed at night on a paved path that disappeared in nearby bushes after a few seconds.
2.	30.60888, 77.44916 (685 m asl)	09 July 2018	A subadult rescued from inside a small hut, where it had likely sought shelter.
3.	30.60972, 77.45611 (679 m asl)	26 May 2019	An adult found at night near the Parikrama Path.
4.	30.57611, 77.54111 (614 m asl)	15 September 2021	Two individuals found in a tree hole in the forest.
5.	30.61000, 77.45027 (678 m asl)	05 February 2022	A juvenile rescued near the HPTDC Hotel Renukaji; on 11 February 2022, another individual found within 10 m of the same location; on 20 February 2022, officials from HPTDC called for the rescue of another individual at the same hotel.
6.	30.60611, 77.44861 (681 m asl)	26 May 2023	A road-killed individual had minor injuries at midbody.
7.	30.61055, 77.451667 (675 m asl)	18 August 2023	In response to a rescue call from Nirvana Aashram, a snake was climbing a marbled wall at a height of ~ 2.5 m.

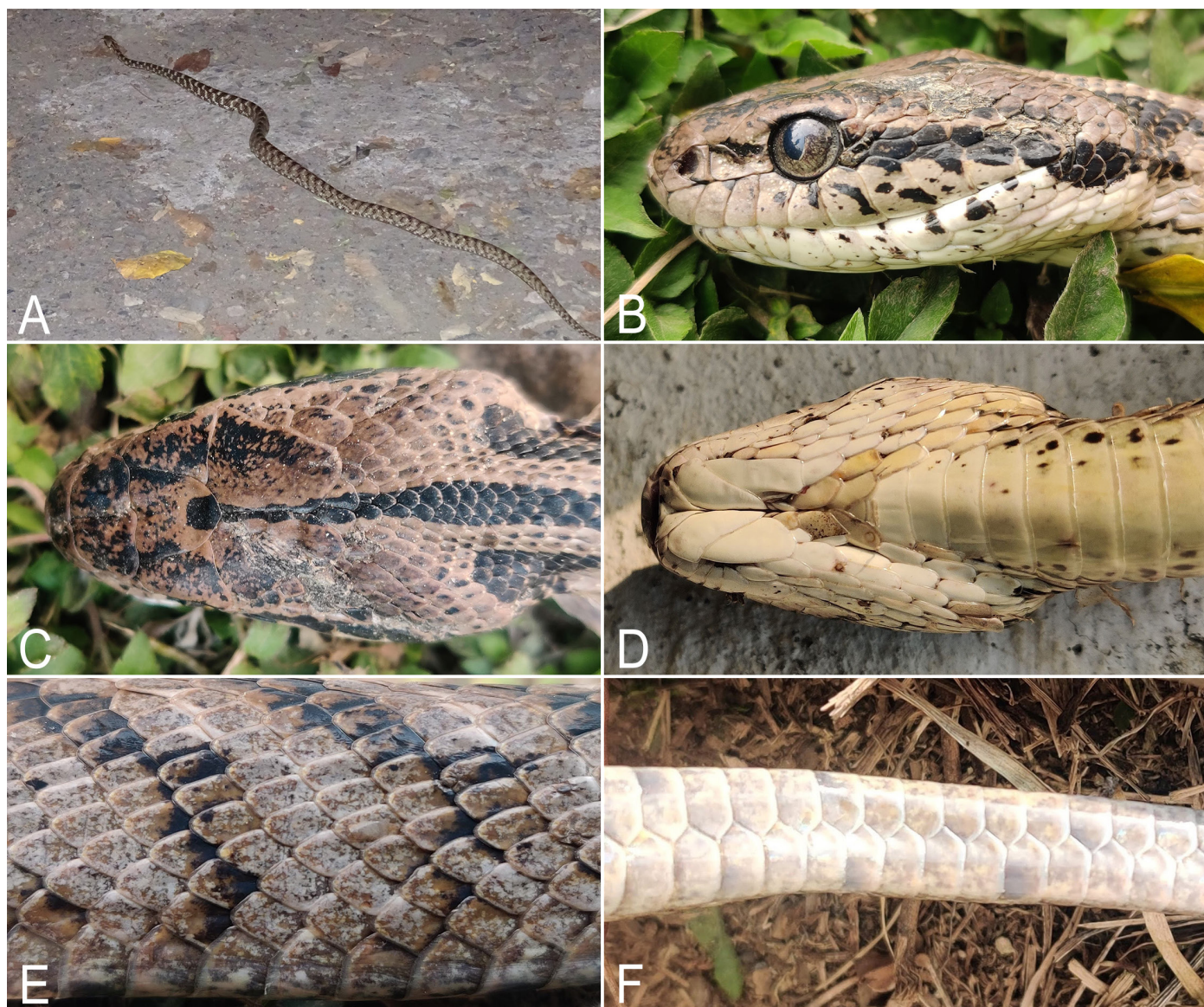


Figure 3. A road-killed Forsten's Catsnake (*Boiga forsteni*) from the Renuka Wildlife Sanctuary near Dadahu, Sirmaur District, Himachal Pradesh, India: full body (A), head (B–D), midbody scales (E), and subcaudals (F). Photographs by Virender Sharma.

been deposited in the Zoological Reference Collection, Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, National University of Singapore (ZRC(IMG) 2.703a–f). The identity of the specimen was confirmed by Vivek Sharma.

Sirmaur District shares a boundary with Uttarakhand, raising the possibility that many species found in Uttarakhand may also inhabit Sirmaur. For instance, the King Cobra (*Ophiophagus hannah*), which is frequently observed in Uttarakhand, was recorded in Sirmaur by Kapoor et al. (2022), highlighting the potential for undiscovered biodiversity in Sirmaur and other parts of Himachal Pradesh.

Acknowledgements

We thank the Himachal Pradesh Forest Department for granting permission to conduct our research.

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