



Notes on the Occurrence of the Condanarus Sandsnake, *Psammophis condanarus* (Merrem 1820), in “Bengal,” and a Specific Locality Record from the State of West Bengal, India

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The Condanarus Sandsnake (*Psammophis condanarus*), one of the most widely distributed snakes in India, also occurs in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan (Limbu et al. 2022). In India, this snake currently is known from northern, eastern, central, and peninsular India (Whitaker and Captain

2004; Chandra and Gajbe 2005; Saikia et al. 2007; Ganesh et al. 2017; Vishal et al. 2020; Swamy et al. 2021). However, despite the absence of any published records or voucher specimens, a number of publications (e.g., Ahmed and Dasgupta 1992; Whitaker and Captain 2004; Haider et al. 2022) men-



Figure 1. A Condanarus Sandsnake (*Psammophis condanarus*) from Murshidabad, West Bengal, India (A), and lateral (B), dorsal (C), and ventral aspects of its head (D). Photographs by Proloy Chatterjee.

tion this species to be present in West Bengal, which warrants further clarification. We herein report a new record of *P. condanarus* from within the modern geopolitical boundaries of West Bengal, along with a brief commentary on the overall status (past and present) of its occurrence in the state.

At ~1530 h on 30 October 2024, when responding to a rescue call in No. 2 Nishindra Colony, Farakka Barrage Township, Murshidabad District, West Bengal, PC found a slender snake (Fig. 1) in a burrow in the courtyard of a house (24.79472, 87.91263). External morphological characteristics and meristic data were congruent with descriptions of *P. condanarus* in Boulenger (1890), Wall (1911), and Smith (1943). Habitat in the area where the snake was found consisted of densely packed houses and trees, typical of a semi-urban neighborhood of central West Bengal (Fig. 2). Local residents were unable to identify the snake but reported seeing it several times, often around trees (Limbu et al. 2021). The snake was released at the site of capture. Photographic vouchers were submitted to the Zoological Reference Collection, Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, National University of Singapore (ZRC(IMG)2.691a–d) and the identity of the species was verified by Dr. Jayaditya Purakayastha (Help Earth, Guwahati).

Psammophis condanarus was originally described by Merrem (1820) based on a plate in Russell (1796) that illustrated a snake found on the Circar Coastal Plains, Ganjam District, currently in Odisha, India. Slater (1891) mentioned that not one but two specimens of this species in the collection of the Indian Museum, that bear voucher numbers 7594 and 7595, were procured from “Lower Bengal.” Ahmed and Dasgupta (1992), in their listing of *P. condanarus* among reptilian fauna of West Bengal, cited only the former specimen but expressed uncertainty about the specific location. Das et al. (1998) listed no type specimen(s) of this species in the collection of the Zoological Survey of India, Kolkata (formerly the Indian Museum). Citing Das et al. (1998), Uetz et al.

(2025) lists specimen ZSI 7600 as the holotype of *P. condanarus*; that specimen, however, was listed as the holotype of erstwhile *Phayrea isabellina* [currently *Lygophis lineatus* (Linnaeus 1758)], which is a Neotropical species. The name *Phayrea isabellina* has been erroneously associated with *P. condanarus* (see Ganesh et al. 2017), and we thus discuss it no further.

Noteworthy is that at the time of the description of *P. condanarus*, both present day Odisha and West Bengal used to be parts of Bengal Presidency, one of the legislatures under the East India Company rule (Gupta 2012), possibly explaining why several publications include “Bengal” or “Lower Bengal” in the distribution of *P. condanarus*. However, the lack of specific localities in those publications only adds to the confusion regarding whether or not the recorded specimens were from within the current state boundary of West Bengal. Likewise, we think that a statement in Wall (1911), “It inhabits Peninsular India from Sind in the West to Bengal (about 86° longitude)...” was later interpreted as 86° East Longitude in West Bengal (Whitaker and Captain 2004; Haider et al. 2022). In any case, we believe that these instances likely are responsible for the notion that this species occurs in West Bengal. Thus, in light of the confusion in the literature, we are inclined to believe that no definitive records of *P. condanarus* (photographs, videos, voucher specimens, etc.) emanated from within the modern geopolitical boundary of West Bengal — until now.

Our record is 51.06 km and 82.26 km northwest of the recorded locations in Chapainawabganj and Rajshahi, respectively, that are listed in Haider et al. (2022). Khan (2018) had recorded two specimens from Bangladesh, one from Rajshahi and another from southwestern Bangladesh (Kushtia?). The new record from West Bengal and those from Bangladesh tie the distribution of *P. condanarus* to the Ganges River System, suggesting that the notion of snakes being dispersed with floods or river flow (see Haider et al. 2022) is plausible. Considering the absence of potential barriers to dispersal and more or less homogenous habitats, we believe these snakes are likely to occur naturally farther north and south of the current known location in Murshidabad, West Bengal.

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Figure 2. The house courtyard and surrounding habitat where the Condanarus Sandsnake (*Psammophis condanarus*) was found in Murshidabad, West Bengal, India. Photograph by Proloy Chatterjee.

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