



First Record of the Ocellated Brown Snake, *Xenelaphis ellipsifer* Boulenger 1900, from Kelantan, Peninsular Malaysia: A Noteworthy Addition to the Local Herpetofauna

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Malaysia, recognized as a herpetofaunal biodiversity hotspot within Southeast Asia, is characterized by high species richness and endemism within diverse tropical ecosystems (Ahmad Ruzman et al. 2021). However, the distribution and population status of many species remain poorly understood, particularly those that are rare or infrequently reported. Known for its distinctive elliptical markings, the Ocellated Brown Snake (*Xenelaphis ellipsifer*) is a large colubrid found in peninsular Malaysia, Borneo, and Sumatra (Uetz et al. 2025). The first record of this species was a specimen found in a fish trap above the Sarawak River in Malaysia (Boulenger 1900) and, more recently, the first record of this species in southern Thailand was reported from Bannang Sata District, Yala Province (Pawangkhanant et al. 2025). This rare, semi-aquatic snake, which can reach a maximum total length of 251 cm, has a strong association with pools and streams in primary and secondary rainforests at elevations of 150–1,100 m asl (Charlton 2020).

The first record of *X. ellipsifer* from peninsular Malaysia in 1954 was from Bukit Larut, Perak; subsequently a skin attributed to this species was reported in 1957 from the Cameron Highlands, Pahang (Tweedie 1983). Subsequent published reports have been scarce, with accounts from Gombak River, Selangor (Auliya and Shepherd 2009), Kampung Chennah, Negeri Sembilan (Chan and Norhayati 2009), and Bukit Fraser, Pahang (Schweinhart 2018). We herein report the first confirmed occurrence of *X. ellipsifer* in the state of Kelantan in northern peninsular Malaysia, extending the known range by approximately 150 km.

On 15 October 2024, we found a road-killed juvenile *X. ellipsifer* (~65 cm total length) (Fig. 1) in Jeli District, Kelantan State, Malaysia at an elevation of 630 m asl (in light of the species' scarcity, precise locality details have been

withheld). The road was bordered to the south by primary lowland forest forming part of Gunung Stong State Park, a 21,950-ha conservation area encompassing elevational forest zones from lowland to montane rainforest and reaching elevations as high as 1,399 m asl (Chee et al. 2005). Due to the damaged condition of the snake, key morphological details such as scalation and sex could not be accurately assessed. However, the presence of distinct elliptical dorsal markings and typical coloration identified it as *X. ellipsifer*. A photo-



Figure 1. A road-killed juvenile Ocellated Brown Snake (*Xenelaphis ellipsifer*) from Jeli District, Kelantan, Malaysia. Photograph by Tom Charlton.

graphic voucher was submitted to the *Reptiles & Amphibians* Species Digital Repository (RAJ 000014). In line with journal requirements, the identification was independently confirmed by Mohd Abdul Muin (Universiti Sains Malaysia).

Despite being known to science for over 120 years and currently listed as Least Concern (LC) on the IUCN Red List due to its wide distribution and presence in protected areas (Grismer and Chan-Ard 2012), *X. ellipsifer* remains poorly studied. Key aspects of its natural history (e.g., distribution, population density, reproductive biology, lifespan, diet, and ecological role) are virtually unknown. This record represents

the northernmost known occurrence of *X. ellipsifer* in peninsular Malaysia and suggests a broader distribution than previously understood (Fig. 2). The current known range now comprises the states of Pahang, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Perak, and Kelantan. Notably, this new record from Kelantan lies close to the northern border with the Thai provinces of Narathiwat and Yala, where no published records of *X. ellipsifer* currently exist. This first confirmed record in Kelantan State underscores the importance of ongoing herpetological surveys and vigilant monitoring of roadkills in biodiverse but under-studied regions.

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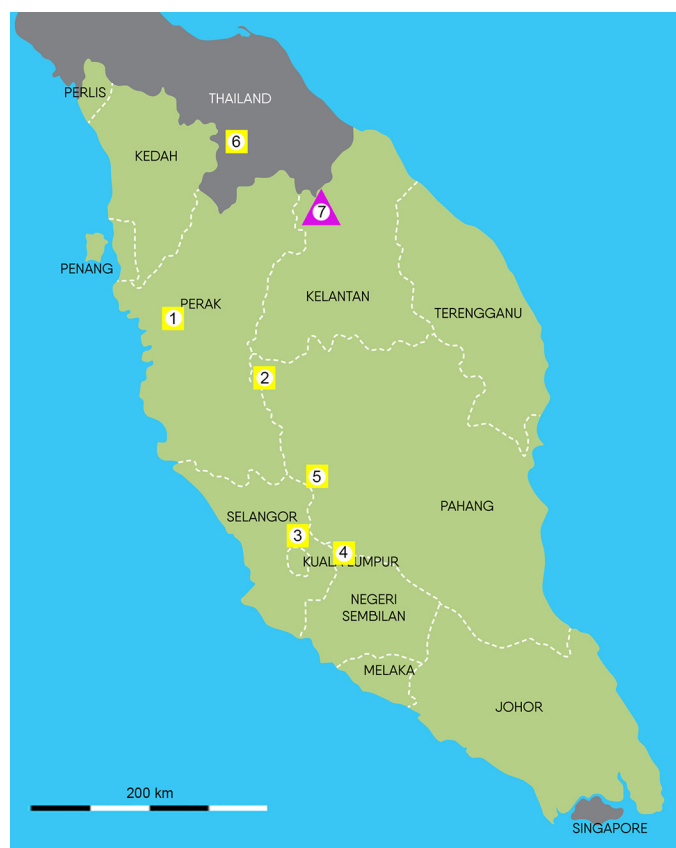


Figure 2. Map showing known locality records for Ocellated Brown Snakes (*Xenelaphis ellipsifer*) in Peninsular Malaysia: Bukit Larut, Perak (1); Cameron Highlands, Pahang (2); Gombak River, Selangor (3); Kampung Chennah, Negeri Sembilan (4); Bukit Fraser, Pahang (5); Bannang Sata District, Yala Province, Thailand (6); and Jeli District, Kelantan (this report) (7).