



First Record of the Ornate Flying Snake, *Chrysopelea ornata* (Shaw 1802), from the Northwestern Coastal Region of Maharashtra, India: Extending the Known Distribution or Human-mediated Introduction?

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The genus *Chrysopelea* comprises five species (Uetz et al. 2025), of which two, *C. ornata* and *C. taprobanica*, occur in India (Daniel 2002; Whitaker and Captain 2004). The Ornate Flying Snake (*Chrysopelea ornata*), a diurnally active opisthoglyph known for its unique gliding capabilities and striking coloration, is widely distributed across the Indian Subcontinent and Southeast Asia, including Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, and parts of Malaysia (Das 2002;

Whitaker and Captain 2004). In India, the species occurs in habitats that include dry deciduous forests to rainforests and even peri-urban environments (Daniel 2002; Whitaker and Captain 2004).

Published records of *Chrysopelea ornata* in Maharashtra are largely from the southern Konkan region, particularly Sindhudurg and Ratnagiri Districts (Daniel 2002; Whitaker and Captain 2004; Rathod et al. 2024). However, its pres-



Figure 1. An Ornate Flying Snake (*Chrysopelea ornata*) rescued from Khunavade, Gholvad East, Dahanu, Palghar District, Maharashtra, India. Photographs by Mayuresh Hendre.

ence in the northwestern region, particularly in Palghar and surrounding districts, has not been documented and the region has been considered outside the species' known range. To date, no voucher-supported records have been published from the region.

Palghar District in the northwestern coastal region of Maharashtra is a transitional zone between the Konkan coast and the northern Western Ghats. Despite its ecological richness, comprising a mosaic of moist deciduous forests, scrublands, and agricultural landscapes, the region remains underexplored in terms of herpetofaunal diversity. Limited field studies in this area have left significant gaps regarding the distribution and occurrence of many reptilian taxa.

We herein report the first confirmed sighting of *Chrysopelea ornata* from Dahanu, Palghar District, a new distributional record for the species in Maharashtra. Although this isolated observation might not represent a natural range extension, it does emphasize the need for systematic herpetofaunal surveys in understudied regions.

At about 1615 h on 3 February 2025, a rescue call regarding an unidentified snake in Khunavade Village, Gholvad East, Dahanu Taluka, Palghar District, Maharashtra (20.0710790, 72.7894969), was received by the Wildlife Welfare Association, a non-governmental organization based in Thane, Maharashtra. Upon reaching the site, rescuers discovered and safely rescued the snake that was concealed in a narrow crevice beneath the roof of a residential structure. A preliminary identification of the snake as a subadult *Chrysopelea ornata* was based on characteristics described in Whitaker and Captain (2004) and was later confirmed by Aniket Rajendra Kadam. Total length was 690 mm, SVL 480 mm, tail length 210 mm, head length 18.5 mm, dorsal scale rows 17:17:13, supralabials 9/9 (5th and 6th in contact with the orbit), infralabials 10/9, loreals 1/1, preoculars 1/1, postoculars 2/2, temporals 2+2+2, prefrontals 2, ventrals 218, subcaudals 139, and cloacal divided; the right nasal was entire, the left partially divided; anterior chin shields contacted infralabials 1, 2, 3, and 5 on the left and 1–4 on the right side; posterior chin shields contacted infralabials 4 and 5 on the right and 5 on the left side. The rescue and identification were reported to the Forest Department. The

snake was examined by a veterinarian and deemed fit before being released in suitable natural habitat near where it was rescued. Photographic vouchers (Fig. 1) were deposited in the Zoological Reference Collection, Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, National University of Singapore, under accession number (ZRC(IMG) 2.700a–e.).

This record from Palghar District, Maharashtra is approximately 130 km southeast of the Dang Forest in Gujarat, the nearest documented locality for the species. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first record of *C. ornata* from northwestern Maharashtra; as such, it could represent an extension of the species' known range in the state but the absence of prior confirmed sightings in this region warrants caution. Further investigations and repeated observations will be necessary to determine whether this occurrence represents a natural population or a human-mediated introduction.

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