



# An Aberrant Striped Mountain Pitviper, *Ovophis monticola* (Günther 1864), from Mizoram, India

Malsawmdawngliana<sup>1</sup>, Michael Vanlalchhuana<sup>2</sup>, Mara Duasa Hlychho<sup>1</sup>, Mathipi Vabeiryureilai<sup>1</sup>, and Hmar Tlawmte Lalremsanga<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Cytogenetics Laboratory, Department of Zoology, Mizoram University, Mizoram-796004, India (dawngliana3@gmail.com [corresponding author])

<sup>2</sup>Developmental Biology and Herpetology Laboratory, Department of Zoology, Mizoram University, Mizoram-796004, India (MV: m.vabeiryureilai@gmail.com; HTL: htlrsa@yahoo.co.in)

Pattern and coloration in snakes are fundamental traits that influence thermoregulation, camouflage, predator avoidance, prey capture, and mate recognition (e.g., Bechtel 1995). Variations such as melanism, axanthism, and pattern aberrations have been widely documented in reptiles (e.g., Bechtel 1995; Krecsák 2008; Fleck et al. 2016; Sahlean et al. 2025). Such atypical morphs, although rare, have been documented in dozens of species of snakes and often involve defects or modifications in pigment expression rather than complete loss of pigmentation (e.g., Fleck et al. 2016; Uetz et al. 2025).

Reports of aberrant morphs in the family Viperidae are relatively rare. However, for example, Di Marzio (2021) described a leucistic Common Adder (*Vipera berus*), and melanism and pattern variation in Asp Vipers (*Vipera aspis*) can be geographically structured and linked with environmental factors such as temperature and elevation, consistent with the thermal melanism hypothesis, whereby darker morphs may confer thermoregulatory advantages in certain climates (Di Nicola et al. 2024; Storniolo et al. 2025).

On 1 September 2025, an aberrant subadult male Mountain Pitviper (*Ovophis monticola*) (SVL 178 mm) (Fig. 1 was collected in Phuldungsei, Mamit District, Mizoram, India

(23.46833, 92.41917; elev. ~845 m asl). Morphometrics and scale patterns (dorsal rows 23:23:19, 144 ventral scales, and 10 subcaudals with a missing tip of the tail) corresponded with published descriptions in Whitaker and Captain (2004). However, although eye pigmentation was normal, the dorsum had two light-brown to beige fields bordering a prominent black band extending from the head to the tip of the tail, small dark blotches on each flank, and a light grayish-brown venter with peripheral blackish spots extending onto the subcaudals, a pattern which differed markedly from typical coloration and pattern in the species (Fig. 2). To the best of our knowledge, this is the first report of a lined pattern morph in *O. monticola*. The specimen was preserved in 70% ethanol and catalogued in the Natural History Museum of Mizoram, Mizoram University, Aizawl (NHMM SE56).

Other lined color morphs in snakes have been documented recently. Trivedi and Desai (2019) and Parmar and Kaiser (2024) reported lined morphs of *Daboia russelii*, and Patel and Parmar (2025) described a lined morph of an Annulated Seasnake (*Hydrophis cyanocinctus*). Collectively, these records show that aberrant longitudinal pattern morphs occur in diverse lineages and suggest that these similar pat-



**Figure 1.** Dorsum, venter, and head of an aberrant pattern morph of a Mountain Pitviper (*Ovophis monticola*) from Phuldungsei, Mizoram, India. Photographs by Lalmuansanga.



**Figure 2.** A typical color morph of the Mountain Pitviper (*Ovophis monticola*) from Mizoram, India. Photograph by H.T. Lalremsanga.

terns arise through convergent developmental processes rather than genetic mechanisms. Further genetic and developmental studies will be necessary to determine whether shared or independent mutations underlie these phenotypes.

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