



Article

A new species of coralsnake of the genus *Calliophis* (Squamata: Elapidae) from the west coast of peninsular India

ERIC N. SMITH¹, HEMANT OGALE², V. DEEPAK³ & VARAD B. GIRI⁴

¹Department of Biology, The University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, Texas 76019, USA. E-mail: e.smith@uta.edu

²556, Shanti Kunj, A/Pamboli, Sawantwadi, Sindhudurg 416532, Maharashtra, India. E-mail: hemantogale@yahoo.co.in

³Wildlife Institute of India, P.O. Box #18, Dehradun 248 001, Uttarakhand, India. E-mail: deepaksalea@gmail.com

⁴Bombay Natural History Society, Collections Department, Hornbill House, S. B. Singh Road, Mumbai 400 023, India.

E-mail: varadgiri@gmail.com, gaikwadkshamata@gmail.com

Abstract

We describe a new species of coralsnake, *Calliophis castoe*, from western peninsular India. The discovery of this new species comes as a surprise because it is a venomous snake from both lowland and mountainous areas that are accessible and well populated. The new species differs from all other *Calliophis*, the Tropical Asian coralsnakes, in having unicolored and dark body and tail dorsa, an orange head band, a salmon color to scarlet body and tail underside, four maxillary teeth behind the fang (the highest number, except for some individuals of *C. maculiceps*) and, in having the prefrontals touching the third supralabial while having both a preocular and a nasal (except for some *C. beddomei*). *Calliophis castoe* also differs from all other Indian coralsnakes, with the exception of some *Sinomicrurus maccllellandi*, in having an unpatterned body, no dark pigmentation on the last supralabial, and a wide post-temporal band. We also present mitochondrial DNA sequence differences between the new taxon and *C. nigrescens*. The new specie is the second species of coralsnake known from the state of Goa (beside *C. nigrescens*), the third known from Maharashtra (beside *C. melanurus* and *C. nigrescens*), and the fifth known from the state of Karnataka (beside *C. beddomei*, *C. bibroni*, *C. melanurus*, and *C. nigrescens*).

Key words: *Calliophis castoe* new species, Goa, Karnataka, Maharashtra, snakes

Introduction

In 1887, in The Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), H. M. Phipson reported on a *Callophis nigrescens* Günther, 1862 with a dark-dorsum and a unicolored red-venter collected by G. W. Vidal at Carwar [Karwar], Bombay Presidency. Later in 1890, in the same journal, G. W. Vidal published an account on the venomous snakes of North Kanara, now the district of Uttara Kannada of the state of Karnataka, India. Vidal lists nine species of venomous snakes for that region, among them *C. nigrescens*, represented by one specimen deposited at the collection of the BNHS, the same specimen reported by Phipson (1887). We are unaware of any other reference of Uttara Kannada specimens of *C. nigrescens* until Frank Wall's 1913 description of the variety "khandallensis" of *C. nigrescens* (*Hemibungarus* in original description). Wall's variety was applied to a dark specimen from Khandalla, in the mountains above Bombay, different from the Karwar variety. In 1928, in his fourth edition of *The Poisonous Terrestrial Snakes of our British Indian Dominions (including Ceylon) and how to recognize them, with symptoms of snake poisoning and treatment*, Wall (1928) describes the color patterns in *C. nigrescens* as being variable and consisting of four varieties, A–D. His variety A is described as having a uniformly brown back to the middle of the second scale row, no chevron on the nape, and some dark color on the upper surface of the head. The ventral color he describes only as "Belly as in Variety D—"uniform coral pink; paler pink or whitish in young specimens." Wall (1928) also mentions that this variety is rare and that he has only seen one specimen, from Karwar. This specimen is the one donated by Vidal to the BNHS collection, and the only one of its kind that we know was available to him (i.e. Vidal). Obviously, Wall had changed his mind in assigning the Karwar specimen to the *khandallensis* variety. Wall's (1928) variety B agrees with what is now *C. beddomei* Smith, 1943.