



Additional Record of Common Trinket Snake *Coelognathus helena helena* (Daudin, 1803) (Reptilia: Serpentes: Colubridae) from Doon Valley, Dehra Dun, Uttarakhand (India), with Systematic Account, Distribution and Other Aspects

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ABSTRACT: The paper deals with the additional record of *Coelognathus helena helena*, the Common Trinket Snake from Doon Valley, Dehra Dun, Uttarakhand (India), with its systematic account, distribution, habitat, food & feeding, breeding, behaviour, conservation status and other subspecies with their distribution.

Keywords: Additional record, *Coelognathus helena helena*, Dehra Dun.

INTRODUCTION

The reptilian fauna of Dehra Dun (Uttarakhand, India) has attracted the attention of some workers during the past (Bhatnagar, 1969, 1972; Husain & Ray 1995; Husain & Tilak 1995; Husain, 2003; Bahuguna, 2010, 2014; Dhalave, 2013; Das *et al.* 2015; Husain *et al.*, 2020) but still much to be explored. Recently a snake was sighted and photographed during early morning hours in a residential colony (Hari Vihar, Vijay Park) in Western Doon Valley part, Dehra Dun, Uttarakhand (India), which on study was found to be *Coelognathus helena helena*, the Common Trinket Snake, belonging to family Colubridae under order Serpentes and recorded here for the first time from the area. Earlier, Bahuguna (2010); Dhalave (2013); Husain *et al.* (2020) recorded it from other localities/residential areas in Dehra Dun. Maybe, they invade residential colonies in search of rats, shrews etc.

It is characteristically coloured non-venomous snake, with two black stripes on sides of neck, squarish black and white cross bars encircling white ocelli and distinct dark brown stripes along sides of mid-body and tail.

For its beauty, the species is named after Helen of Troy, the most beautiful woman (Beolens *et al.*, 2011).

STUDY SITE: Hari Vihar (Vijay Park), Dehra Dun, Uttarakhand (India)

The Hari Vihar colony falls under Vijay Park on Chakrata Road and is located in Western Doon Valley part of Dehra Dun (Coordinates: 30.345°N, 78.029°E) and is lush green with grassy parks, good number of trees (Mango, Litchi, Neem, Maulsari, Ashoka, Jamun, Bottle Brush, Pride of India, White Mulberry, Palms, Cheeku, Guava, Lemon, Papaya etc.) and ornamental plants.

SYSTEMATIC ACCOUNT WITH DISTRIBUTION & OTHER ASPECTS

Coelognathus helena helena (Daudin, 1803)

Coluber Helena Daudin, 1803. *Hist. Nat.Rept.*, 6: 227 (type-locality: Vizagapatam [Vishakapatnam], Andhra Pradesh, S. E. India); Boulenger, 1890. *The Fauna of British India, including Ceylon and Burma*. Reptilia and Batrachia: 331-332.

Elephehelena, Smith, 1943. *Faun. Brit. India*, Reptilia and Amphibia, 3(Serpentes): 149; Husain & Ray, 1995. Reptilia. In: Fauna of Western Himalaya, Part 1, Uttar Pradesh. *Himalayan Ecosystem Series*: 164; Husain & Tilak, 1995. Snakes (Reptilia: Serpentes). In: Fauna of Rajaji National Park. *Fauna of Conservation Areas*, 5: 101, pl. II, Fig. 1; Bahuguna, 2010. Reptilia. In: Fauna of Uttarakhand. *State Fauna Series*, 18 (1): 501.

Coelognathus helena, Ganesh & Wickramasinghe, 2021. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species; Helfenberger, 2001. *Russ. J. Herpetol.* (Suppl): 1-56; Dhavale, 2013. *Indian Forester*, 139 (10): 957; Varadaraju and Deepak, C. K., 2018. Reptilia. In: *Faunal diversity of Indian Himalaya*: 828; Mohapatra *et al.* (2024). Fauna of India Checklist: Chordata: Reptilia: 10.

Coelognathus helena helena, Whitaker & Captain, 2008. *Snakes of India: The Field Guide*: 100, fig.; Bahuguna, A., 2010. Reptilia. In: Fauna of Uttarakhand. *State Fauna Series*, 18 (1): 447 (*Coelognathus helena helena*), 477-478 (*Coelognathus helena helena*= *Elaphe helena*); Thakur, 2011. *Reptile Rep* (11): 2-4; Das *et al.*, 2015. *Knowing Campus Snakes*: 19-20, fig.; Husain *et al.*, 2020. *International Journal of Global Science Research*, 7 (1): 1104-1108; Ahmed *et al.* (2021). *Snakes and other Reptiles of Chhattisgarh, The Field Guide*: 70, 3 figs.

Common Names: Common Trinket Snake or Trinket Snake.

Vernacular Names: *Alankrit Saanp* (Hindi); *Taskar* (Marathi).

Classification: Class Reptilia, order Squamata Linnaeus, 1758, suborder Serpentes Linnaeus, 1758, super family Colubroidea Gray, 1849, family Colubridae Oppel, 1811, subfamily Colubrinae Oppel, 1811, genus *Coelognathus* Fitzinger, 1843.

Sighting: 1 example (on road side); Hari Vihar, Vijay Park, Chakrata Road, Dehra Dun, Uttarakhand, India; 16.ix.2024 (early morning hrs.); by Mr. P. K. Jain.

Description:

Shape: Narrow-headed with slender bodied.

Colouration: Adults dark brown or tan above with squarish black and white bars, arranged like rings/cross bars, lodged with 4-6 white ocelli, distinct dark brown stripes along sides of mid-body and tail, hind body uniform above; head with two black stripes on sides of neck; a black vertical streak below each eye and an oblique one behind; belly whitish or yellowish and may be with some black dots/spots and string-like markings on sides; juveniles paler.

Scales: Smooth, mid-body dorsal scales and tail region scales may be feebly keeled; ventral scales broad, angulate laterally; anal scale entire (rarely divided); sub-caudal scales paired.

Size: Adults may attain a total length of 1.4 m, including 25 cm longtail (Boulenger, 1890; en.wikipedia.org); 1.60 m, males shorter than females (Husain & Tilak 1995); 0.70-1.68 m (Whitaker & Captain 2008); maximum length 1680 mm (66 in.) (Bahuguna, 2010); medium-sized, av. length 70 cm, maximum length 168 cm (Das *et al.*,

2015); length 152 cm, max. 170 cm, new born about 23-25 cm (Ahmed *et al.*, 2021).

Altitudinal Range: 500-2,000 m (Husain & Tilak, 1995); low to mid elevations, up to 3,000 m (Ahmed *et al.*, 2021); from sea level to 2,500 m but around houses (Ganesh & Wickramasinghe 2021); up to 900 m (reptile-database.reptarium.cz).

Distribution:

India:

Uttarakhand:

Dehra Dun: Dehra Dun, locality not mentioned (Husain & Ray, 1995); Sabhawala (Bahuguna, 2010); New Forest (Dhalve, 2013); Ballupur and Sirmaur Marg (Husain *et al.*, 2020); Hari Vihar, Vijay Park (present record).

Rest of Uttarakhand: Almora, Haridwar (Mohand), Nainital, Pauri, Tehri and Uttarkashi districts, Rajaji Tiger Reserve and Corbett Tiger Reserve (Western Himalaya) (Husain & Ray, 1995; Husain & Tilak, 1995; Varadaraju & Deepak, 2018; Husain *et al.*, 2020).

Rest of India: Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh (Western Himalaya), Jammu & Kashmir UT (Poonch), Manipur and Nagaland and Sikkim (Central Himalaya) (Bahuguna, 2010; Varadaraju & Deepak, 2018; Husain *et al.*, 2020; Ahmed *et al.*, 2021).

Elsewhere: Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka (Husain & Tilak, 1995; Varadaraju & Deepak, 2018; Husain *et al.*, 2020). Records from Pakistan (Shangla) need confirmation as pointed out by Whitaker & Captain (2004).

Habitat: Generally found in or near termite mounds, rocks, piles of bricks or stones and crevices during summer, on leafy trees and bushes during cooler months and forests (Whitaker & Captain 2008; Ganesh & Wickramasinghe 2021).

Food & Feeding: Voracious rat eater, also feeds on frogs & toads, lizards, small geckos/snakes, mice, and squirrels depends on availability and hunger, juveniles feed on insects and small lizards (Husain & Tilak 1995; Bahuguna, 2010; Ganesh & Wickramasinghe 2021).

Breeding: Breeds throughout the year, mostly in summer months, when female lays 6-16 elongated eggs and newborns seen from pre-monsoon to winter months (Husain & Tilak 1995; Whitaker & Captain 2008; Ahmed *et al.*, 2021; Ganesh & Wickramasinghe 2021).

Behaviour: Both diurnal and nocturnal; actively defensive, makes near vertical 2-3 S-shaped coils of forebody, opens mouth ready for striking and may strike repeatedly, if molested, in danger or disturbed; its bite often very damaging due to the inward pointing teeth, though it is non-venomous;

males generally more aggressive than females (Whitaker & Captain, 2008; Bahuguna, 2010; Das *et al.*, 2015; Husain *et al.*, 2020; Ganesh & Wickramasinghe, 2021; en.wikipedia.org).

Conservation Status: IUCN Red List- Least Concern (Ganesh & Wickramasinghe, 2021); Indian Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 2022-Schedule II (Mohapatra *et al.*, 2024).

Threats: Killing by humans due to its aggressive behaviour, road kills and deforestation (Ahmed *et al.*, 2021).

Other Subspecies and their Distribution:

1. *Coelognathus Helena monticollaris* (Schulz, 1992) (type-locality: Mangalore, Karnataka), the Montane Trinket Snake, found in Western Ghats (Goa, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala and Maharashtra); endemic to India.

2. *Coelognathus helenanigriangularis* Mohapatra *et al.*, 2016 (type-locality: Gupteswar, Koraput district, Odisha), the Angular Trinket Snake, reported from North-east Andhra Pradesh, Central-southern Chhattisgarh (including Gariaband and Durg districts), Madhya Pradesh, Eastern Maharashtra and Odisha; endemic to India.



Fig. 1a. *Coelognathus helena helena*, Common Trinket Snake.



Fig. 1b. *Coelognathus helena helena*, Common Trinket Snake.



Fig. 1c. *Coelognathus helena helena*, Common Trinket Snake.

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