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**First record of *Lytorhynchus paradoxus* (Günther, 1875) (Serpentes: Colubridae) from the Republic of India, with notes on its distribution**

(with two text-figures)

In August 2003, two of the authors came across an unusual looking colubrid snake in Ramgadh (Sikkar district, Rajasthan, western India). The snake was found at night, photographed the next morning and released immediately thereafter. The only scalation data recorded was the number of midbody scale rows. No voucher specimen was collected, but two photographic slides of the snake- a dorsal view of the entire body (Fig. 1) and another in which the left lateral aspect of the head is visible, enabled us to identify the snake as *Lytorhynchus paradoxus*.

After consulting literature, especially comprehensive checklists of Indian snakes by Whitaker (1978) and Das (1997, 2003), we find this snake represents the first record of this genus and species from within the political boundaries of present day India. High resolution scans of the aforementioned images have been deposited at the Centre for Herpetology, Madras Crocodile Bank Trust, Mamallapuram 603 104, Tamil Nadu, India.

Scalation, morphological details and colour pattern based on field observations as well as those gleaned from scanned images of the Indian specimen- Scales smooth, in 19 rows at midbody. Head slightly broader than neck; snout declivous; body mildly, but noticeably triangular in cross section; tail short, tip pointed. Rostral rhomboidal; pointed in front, angular behind. Eye large with vertically elliptical pupil; nostril - narrow slit between two large scales; frontal expanded anteriorly; touching upper preocular; prefrontals larger than internasals; preoculars 3; loreal 1; postoculars 2. Pale brown above; midline of back with a series of at least 40 'H' or 'X'- shaped dark brown marks connected by a white, ribbon-like stripe. Sides of body with smaller, less distinct brown spots which alternate

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with those on the mid-back. Back of head with large brown, elongate blotch; broad brown streak from eye to angle of mouth; a similar coloured mark below eye. Underside glossy white. We were unable to determine the number and condition of the supralabials from the images with any certainty, as sand particles had adhered to and obscured some of their margins.

The snake was identifiable as a member of the genus *Lytorhynchus* on the bases of its midbody scale rows; awl-shaped head; uniquely shaped rostral scale; oblique, slit-like nostril and moderately short tail.

Identification to species was made after comparing scanned dorsal and lateral views of the head with descriptions and figures in Günther (1875: 576), Boulenger (1890: 322-3), Smith (1943: 189-192), Minton (1966: 130-1, plate 29), Leviton and Anderson (1970: 255, 268-270) and Khan (2002: 111, 143). It should be noted that though captioned correctly, Fig. 59 depicting dorsal and ventral aspects of the head of *L. maynardi* has been placed under the description of *Lytorhynchus paradoxus* Smith (1943: 191). Boulenger (1890: 322) provided dorsal and lateral views of the head of *L. paradoxus*. Comparisons of the scanned images with the holotype BMNH 1946.1.14.75 (formerly BMNH 72.4.17.162) revealed no notable differences in dorsal colour pattern or scalation of the head, consistent with the identification as *Lytorhynchus paradoxus*.

We follow Smith (1943: 189-192) who used the shape and condition of the rostral scale to distinguish between the three species of *Lytorhynchus* that are known to occur in this region. The rostral scale of the snake from Rajasthan is neither “truncate anteriorly- *L. ridgewayi*”; nor is it “anchor-shaped when viewed from above- *L. maynardi*”. The rostral is undoubtedly, “pointed anteriorly, angular posteriorly” and separates the internasals for between half to one-third of their length - key characters for *L. paradoxus*.

The following key characters used by Leviton and Anderson (1970: 255, 270) to diagnose *Lytorhynchus paradoxus* are also evident in scans of the snake from Ramgadh, Rajasthan, In-

dia- rostral shield narrowed and pointed, not truncate, broader at its base than at its anterior most projection; prefrontals paired; ground colour greyish brown with series of darker brown, not black, blotches, not cross bars. We were unable to determine the number of ventrals, subcaudals and the condition of the anal (also used by the aforementioned in their key to members of this genus). Dorsal body pattern closely resembles Leviton and Anderson’s depiction of a specimen from the California Academy of Sciences- CAS 101412. However the dorsal aspect of the rostral scale of the Rajasthan snake is distinctly unlike that of *Lytorhynchus paradoxus* as depicted by Leviton and Anderson in figure 21 (1970: 269) and Khan (2003: 111). Despite this glaring discrepancy, it compares well with figures and descriptions in other literature cited above as well as the holotype BMNH 1946.1.14.75 (formerly BMNH 72.4.17.162) and we are convinced that the abovementioned snake from Ramgadh (Sikkar district, Rajasthan, western India) is indeed *Lytorhynchus paradoxus*.

Natural history notes.- The snake was found lying straight on a sand dune (Fig. 2) at approximately 2130 h after a spell of rain. When first handled, it coiled up like a cylindrical spring with its head on the uppermost coil. This behaviour was not repeated subsequently. Whilst photographing the snake, it persistently burrowed into the sand with its snout. It made no attempt to bite when handled.

Günther (1875), who first described this species as *Acontiophis paradoxa* wrote, “A single specimen, twelve inches long (tail 1½ inches); is in the late Dr. Jerdon’s collection. It is rather shrivelled and unfortunately no record as regards the locality where it was found was placed on the bottle. He obtained it probably within the Himalayan region or in Khassya (= the Khasi Hills of the modern Meghalaya State, north-eastern India)”. This is incorrect as the snake is a desert species. Boulenger (1890) recorded “Sind” (at present a Province in Pakistan) as a locality and rightly commented that these were desert snakes, adapted for burrowing in the sand. Wall (1923) recorded *L. paradoxus* from Sind, Punjab,

Multan (all in Pakistan). Smith (1943) gave the range of this species as "Sind (Zangipur); W. Punjab (Multan)"- based on four specimens. These localities are also in Pakistan. He also cited "N. India" as the type locality for *Acontiophis paradoxa* (= *Lytorhynchus paradoxus*) presumably condensing Günther's supposition that Jerdon's specimen came from "within the Himalayan region or in Khassya". Though Khan (2002) also cites the type locality as "Northern India", he goes on to write that this species is "restricted to Zangipur, northern Sindh, Pakistan". Minton (1966) examined specimens from Dadu or Hyderabad; Muzaffargar; Sanghar and Thar Parkar districts- all localities in Pakistan. The Bombay Natural History Society has a single, undated specimen from Thar, Parkar collected by E. Priestly. A typographical error noticed by us was that Minton (1966: 131) cites the type as *Aconitophis paradoxus* Günther, 1875. Khan (2002) also follows this spelling. The actual citation is *Acontiophis paradoxa*- this was followed by both Boulenger (1890: 323) and Smith (1943: 191).

The record of this species from Ramgadh (Sikkar district, Rajasthan, western India) is an approximate range extension of approximately 725 airline kilometers (330 km westward) from Muzaffargar, in Pakistan.

We thank the Bombay Natural History Society for allowing us to examine their collection and the extensive use of their library. We are extremely grateful to David Gower of the Natural History Museum, London for comparing our scanned images with the holotype of *Lytorhynchus paradoxus*; Aaron Bauer of Villanova University for providing us with literature and Sujoy Chaudhuri for estimating the range extension. We also thank Van Wallach, Alan Leviton and Patrick David for comments on earlier drafts which greatly enhanced the content of this note.

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