

WESTERN GHATS RECORD A NEW-TO-SCIENCE SEMI SLUG

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The newly described glossy grey or greyish-white *Varadia amboliensis* with irregular dark mottling measures 6.9 cm long at most, but scientists are enthused by its sensitivity to the slightest of climatic fluctuation.

The genus of the new land species has been named after Varad Giri in recognition of his transformative contribution to the study and conservation of the Indian herpetofauna while the species name 'amboliensis' refers to the Amboli area of Maharashtra's Sindhudurg district.

The study describing it at the end of a five-year research has been published in the *European Journal of Taxonomy*.

Zoologist Amrut R. Bhosale of the Kolhapur-based Shivaji University is the primary author of the study conducted with Dinarzarde Raheem, a scientific associate of London's Natural History Museum.

The collaborators of the study include Christopher Wade of the University of Nottingham, Ahmed Saadi of the University of Vienna, Tejas Thackeray of the Mumbai-based Thackeray Wildlife Foundation, Aasif Tamboli of South Korea's Kyungpook National University and Suhas Kadam and D.V. Muley of Shivaji University.

"Semi-slugs are so-called because their shells are relatively small in comparison to the body, with the shell often partly or almost entirely covered by extensions of the snail's 'skin', the mantle. In the new semi-slug, the parts of the mantle covering the shell lobes are retractable, so that the shell can be completely covered by the mantle or largely exposed," Dr Bhosale said.

The semi-slug is endemic to the northern and central Western Ghats and primarily found in natural forests. It is most active at night and is known from only a handful of localities in Maharashtra, Goa and Karnataka.

The shell of the adult semi-slug is depressed and ranges from glossy golden brown to reddish yellow with rapidly increasing whorls.

Before *Varadia amboliensis*, South Asia had 21 genera and more than 400 described species in the superfamily it belongs to.

"As land snails are ecological indicators, they are susceptible to slight climatic fluctuations. They feed on leaf litter present on the forest floor and dead insects. They are the natural source of calcium to the wild animals as they recycle nutrients such as potassium, manganese and magnesium," Dr. Bhosale told *The Hindu*.

"We still don't know that how many undescribed species of land snails are facing threat. The new semi-slug will help us apply conservation strategies in future."

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