

NEW VINE SNAKE DISCOVERED IN ODISHA BIOSPHERE RESERVE

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Biodiversity, Ecology, and Wildlife Related Issues

A group of researchers has discovered a tenth species of the vine snake of genus *Ahaetulla* after a gap of more than a century.

Before this discovery, there were nine species of vine snakes reported from the country. The *Ahaetulla laudankia*, the newly-discovered snake, was first spotted by researchers in Simlipal Biosphere Reserve near Lulung in Odisha.

According to researchers, Odisha is home to three species: the common Indian vine snake, variable-coloured vine snake and the third being the recently-named *Laudankia* vine snake.

This rare snake has been reported from Mayurbhanj, Balasore and Boudh districts of Odisha and other states such as Maharashtra and Rajasthan. It has ochre brown dorsal body with an orange-red belly.

The genetic distinctiveness has been proven through scientific studies.

The study about the snake was published in the *Journal of Natural History*.

“It was in January 2009, when Prof. Sushil Dutta, a renowned herpetologist, and I first spotted this snake in Simlipal Biosphere Reserve near Lulung while the snake was crossing the forest road around noon. Although we could identify it as a new variety being recorded in the State, it was after we studied two other individuals of the same variety from Boudh and Balasore of Odisha, that we realised it could possibly be a new species we are dealing with,” said Pratyush Mohapatra, a corresponding author of the research paper and a scientist with Zoological Society of India.

Dr. Mohapatra said, “Our search for similar-looking vine snakes across India yielded two more specimens at the National Zoological Collection of Zoological Survey of India, Kolkata, collected from Mount Abu in Rajasthan.”

It took the researchers almost 10 years to describe the species through meticulous observation. “We need to follow certain rules as per International Code of Zoological Nomenclature,” said Prof. Dutta, a co-author.

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Study was carried out in Pakke Tiger Reserve, Arunachal

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