

NEWLY DISCOVERED SPECIES OF GECKO NAMED AFTER JACKIE CHAN

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When actor and martial artist Jackie Chan moved fast and ducked every danger on screen, little did he know that a gecko in the Western Ghats will be named after him as a tribute to his agility.

Researchers from the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS); Centre for Ecological Sciences (CES), Indian Institute of Science; and the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS), Bengaluru, have discovered 12 new species of geckos from the Western Ghats. They have also rediscovered populations of some species which have not been reported since their original discovery over 100 years ago.

The researchers have named one of the new species *Cnemaspis jackieii* or Jackie's Day Gecko for its ability to move rapidly and sneak into the smallest crevices to escape when approached, reminiscent of Mr. Chan's famous stunts.

The study published in the international journal *Zoological Research* is authored by Saunak Pal, Zeeshan A. Mirza, Princia D'souza and Kartik Shanker. "Commonly known as 'dwarf geckos' or even 'day geckos', geckos of the genus 'Cnemaspis' are known to be distributed in Africa, Indo-Sri Lanka and southeast Asia," said Mr. Pal, who carried out extensive field visits across the Western Ghats to collect morphological data, distribution information, specimens and tissue samples.

The researchers found that geckos of the genus *Cnemaspis* are amongst some of the most ancient reptiles known from the Western Ghats, with their origin dating back to over 60 million years ago. The study confirms that these geckos originated even before the Indian plate collided with Asia and diversified across distinct biogeographic barriers in the Western Ghats mountains.

Mr. Mirza from the NCBS examined type specimens of known species in the collection of the Natural History Museum, London, and examined the osteology of Indian species. Princia Dsouza from the CES, IISc, generated molecular data essential for phylogenetic analysis for the collected specimens. This study was part of a larger survey of frogs, lizards and snakes of the Western Ghats, supported by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund between 2009 and 2014. The project, led by Mr. Shanker from CES, IISc, aimed to map the diversity and distribution of these groups in the Ghats, towards discovering species, documenting diversity and using this information towards conservation prioritisation.

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