

## A COLLECTION OF REPTILES FROM THE KALAKAD WILDLIFE SANCTUARY, TAMIL NADU, INDIA

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### SUMMARY

A collection of reptiles from the Kalakad Wildlife Sanctuary located in Tamil Nadu, India is reported. The collections were made during 1984 and 1987 and they include two species of tortoises, 12 lizards and 12 snakes.

### INTRODUCTION

Comprehensive faunistic studies of geographically limited and protected areas such as sanctuaries and biospheres are scarce in India. However, fishes, birds and mammals have been dealt with while the reptiles, despite the fact that they constitute a major component of the biota in any area, are ignored. The only available general works of reference on this group are those of Malcolm Smith's (1931, 1935, 1943) celebrated volumes in the Fauna of British India series and Murthy's (1981-1985) papers. In the circumstances the recent faunistic studies conducted by the Southern Regional Station of the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), Madras in the heart of the Kalakad Wildlife Sanctuary (KWLS), Tamil Nadu, India is a good beginning. This paper reports on the collections which are the best samples of the unique reptile fauna of the evergreen forests of Kalakad, uncontaminated by man and others.

A definitive herpetology of the sanctuary should, however, await further exploration. It is felt, therefore, that the present paper, which records the great majority of reptiles inhabiting the KWLS, will stimulate further herpetological investigations in the area.

### PHYSIOGRAPHY OF THE KALAKAD SANCTUARY

The Kalakad Wildlife Sanctuary is located in Nanguneri Taluq, Tirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu and lies between latitudes 8°25'N and 8°35'N and longitudes 77°25'E and 77°35'E. The hills are covered with dry deciduous forest on the lower slopes and evergreen (shola type) forests on the upper reaches, crossed by rivers and mountain streams. The highest peak is Kalakad Peak (1775 M) and the other noteworthy peaks are Velimalai (1011 M), Kakachi (1233 M), Netterikkal (1350 M), and Tiruvanamalai Peak (1387 M). Of the small but useful rivers springing from the hills, mention should be made of Pachayar, Kilmanimuthar, Nambiar, and Kodumudiar.

With an evolutionary lineage dating back to about 50 million years, the KWLS could boast of the richest and least disturbed patch of 100<sub>2</sub> km of shola forest found in Peninsular India today. It is, therefore, appropriate that the entire Kalakad Reserve Forest was converted into a Wildlife Sanctuary in 1976.

### ACCOUNTS OF SPECIES

#### Turtles and Tortoises

#### Family EMYDIDAE

*Melanochelys trijuga trijuga* (Schweigger) 1814

Madras Pond Tortoise

Found basking on the rocky edge of the streams. Three examples were taken. Common.

#### Family TESTUDINIDAE

*Geochelone elegans* (Schoepff) 1792

Indian Star Tortoise.

A juvenile and adult were picked up from the grassy slopes near Asthan Koil. The most common and most familiar of the land tortoises of India.

**LIZARDS**  
**Family GEKKONIDAE**

*Cnemaspis ornata* (Beddome) 1870  
Ornate Dwarf-Gecko

Two examples were taken from under stones in Kuliratti Estate. A forest species.

*Dravidogecko anamallensis* (Gunther) 1875

One example, found under stones in the Kuliratti Estate, was picked up. A rare gecko, restricted to the Anaimalais, Palnis and Tirunelveli Hills of the Western Ghats.

*Hemidactylus leschenaulti* Dum. & Bibr. 1835

Bark Gecko

One adult was chased out of its hideout under the bark of a giant tree in Sengeltheri and collected. Mainly a tree gecko but often enters human dwellings.

**Family AGAMIDAE**

*Sitana ponticeriana* Cuvier 1829

Fan-throated Lizard

One juvenile was picked up from the forest path in Sengeltheri. The Indian agamid with only four toes. Very common.

*Calotes versicolor* (Daudin) 1802

Indian Garden Lizard

Several samples from all the collecting stations were taken. A diurnal, arboreal lizard found throughout India.

*Calotes grandisquamis* Gunther 1875

Large-scaled Calotes

One specimen, a gravid female, was collected alongside Pachayar River. Recorded only from the Western Ghats. First record from Tirunelveli Hills.

*Calotes calotes* (Linn.) 1758

Green Calotes

One juvenile was picked up while it was crossing the forest path near Thalai Odai. Recorded from the hilly areas both in Eastern and Western Ghats. Also occurs in the Nicobar Islands and Sri Lanka. Though expected to be found in the sanctuary, the specimen under study constitutes the first authentic record.

*Calotes elliotti* Gunther 1864

Two examples were taken from the Sengeltheri forest. A hill species, recorded from the dense forests as well as the jungles at low elevations.

*Psammophilus dorsalis* (Gray) 1831

Peninsular Rock Agama

Two adults, basking on the rocky outcrops around Kombiar, were captured after a long chase. Found both in the plains and hills up to 2000 M. Very common in the Nilgiris and in Karnataka, especially around Bangalore.

**Family CHAMAELEONIDAE**

*Chamaeleo zeylanicus* Laurenti 1768

Indian Chameleon

One sub-adult was picked up from low bushes of Thekkadu Charagam. Common. Restricted to the wooded districts of the Gangetic plains, southern India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

**Family SCINCIDAE**

*Mabuya macularia* (Blyth) 1853

Bronze Grass Skink

Four examples were picked up from the leaf litter in the forest at Sengeltheri. A common skink, found throughout South India and Sri Lanka.

*Mabuya beddomii* (Jerdon) 1870

One example was picked up from under stones in Kuliratti Estate. Found only in South India, both in plains and hills.

## SNAKES Family COLUBRIDAE

*Elaphe helena* (Daudin) 1803

Trinket Snake

One example was picked up in Kuliratti Estate. Mainly a hill species, often found near the cultivated areas and human settlements. Common throughout India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

*Liopeltis calamaria* (Gunther) 1858

Striped-neck Snake

One specimen was taken from the leaf litter in Kavapatti Odai. A widely distributed hill species but is rarely seen.

*Oligodon travancoricus* (Beddome) 1877

One example was picked up in the Vallioor Reserve Forest Office Complex. Although expected to be found throughout the Western Ghats, it is, however, uncommon.

*Xenochrophis piscator* (Schneider) 1799

Checkered Keelback Water Snake

Several examples were seen swimming away in the streams and rivers of the sanctuary. One adult was picked up near Thalai Odai. The commonest water snake of India.

*Amphiesma beddomei* (Gunther) 1864

Three examples were caught from the water edge of Sengeltheri forest. A hill species, restricted to the Western Ghats.

*Ahaetulla nasuta* (Lacepede) 1789

Common Green Whip Snake

Two specimens were picked up from the Gooseberry Tree in the forest opposite Sengeltheri Rest House. Common Whip Snake of India, found both in plains and hills.

*Ahaetulla dispar* (Gunther) 1864

One juvenile was collected from the high grass on the edge of Keelamanimuthar River. Restricted to the Western Ghats. The specimen under study is an interesting record from the Tirunelveli Hills.

*Ahaetulla pulverulenta* (Dum. & Bibr.) 1854

Brown Whip Snake

Two examples were captured in the Sengeltheri Forest. A widespread species but not well represented in collections. First record for the Kalakad Sanctuary.

## Family ELAPIDAE

*Calliophis melanurus* (Shaw) 1802

Slender Coral Snake

One specimen was collected from among stones in the Kodamadi Estate. Found throughout India but is rarely seen because of its nocturnal habits.

## Family VIPERIDAE

*Hypnale hypnale* (Merrem)

Hump-nosed Pit Viper

Found in abundance in all situations of the sanctuary. Three examples were captured at different camps. Seems to prefer rocky areas situated near streams. Arboreal and terrestrial. Restricted to the Western Ghats (India) and Sri Lanka.

*Trimeresurus macrolepis* Beddome 1862

Large-scaled Pit Viper

An adult, resting on the branch of a small tree, in Majolai forest was captured. Found on the ground as well as among the bushes in other localities. Occurs in the hills of both Western and Eastern Ghats (India).

*Trimeresurus malaburicus* (Jerdon) 1854

Malabar Pit Viper

Commonly seen on the rocks and boulders situated on the banks of the rivers/streams throughout the sanctuary. Three examples were picked up from the evergreen forests of Sengeltheri, Kavapatti Odai and Nambi Kovil. A common hill snake of Western and Southern India.

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