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ANDHRA PRADESH

Rare sand snake sighted in Seshachalam hills

A.D. Rangarajan

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Wildlife consultant M. Bubesh Guptha | Photo Credit: Special Arrangement

It is the first sighting in South India in over 70 years, according to wildlife biologists

In what could open new vistas for future research, wildlife biologists have sighted an Indian Sand Snake (*psammophis condanarus*) in the Seshachalam forests, the first in South India in the last 70 years.

The snake is widely distributed in the eastern, northern and central India including parts of the Himalayan foothills, Bengal, Indo-Gangetic plains, north-western arid desert zones including Pakistan and northern parts of Deccan plateau, but not seen in the south.

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The finding has been published in a research article in the latest issue of the *Journal of Threatened Taxa* by S.R. Ganesh of the Chennai Snake Park, Vivek Sharma of the Government Model Science College, Jabalpur, and M. Bubesh Gupta, wildlife consultant at the Biolab of Seshachalam Hills, Tirupati. While Dr. Gupta sighted the snake moving about in a grassy patch during early morning hours at Kapila Theertham, at the foot of the Tirumala hills, in 2013, Mr. Sharma sighted a similar one at Hospet in Bellary district of Karnataka. The Seshachalam biolab functions under the Andhra Pradesh forest department's Tirupati Wildlife Management Circle.

The snake is a smooth and glossy-bodied species with a fairly large head and protruding snout. It was about 53 cm in length, of which its tail alone measured 8 cm. "In 1943, S. Ali reported a similar species from Bandipur near the Western Ghats abutting Mysore plateau on the basis of a single specimen recovered from the stomach of a short toed eagle. After that, this is by far the strongest sighting of sand snake in south India," Dr. Gupta told *The Hindu*. Presently working at the Pitchandikulam forest, Auroville (near Puducherry), Dr. Gupta has published many books on various species, on their rediscovery and new sighting records. He had sighted the Sri Lankan flying snake in 2015 in Chamala valley, which was the first ever sighting in India and reported in *The Hindu*.

The sighting of the Nagarjunasagar Racer, Gooty Trantula, Yellow collared wild snake, Brown vine snake, Slender coral snake, Shield tail snake etc. bears testimony to the biodiversity richness of the Seshachalam habitat. "Further research on this region may bring to light many more such rare and new species," Dr. Gupta felt.

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