

ISSN 2278-2575

Cobra

Vol.-XI Issue -1

January - June 2017



Half-yearly Journal
of the Chennai Snake Park Trust

Annual subscription Individual – Rs. 75/-. Institution – Rs.150/-.

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Cover

Montane trinket snake *Coelognatus helena monticollaris* is a non-venomous, colubrid snake inhabiting wet forest tracts in the Western Ghats, India.

Photo: Ravi Pawar

Chennai Snake Park Trust:
Rajbhavan Post, Chennai – 600 022. India.
Ph: 91-044-22353623
E-mail: cspt1972@gmail.com / Website: cspt.in

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**FIRST RECORD OF ALBINISM IN
MONTANE TRINKET SNAKE
COELOGNATHUS HELENA MONTICOLLARIS
(SCHULZ, 1992)**

Ravi Pawar¹, Rahul Tayade², Akshay Gaikwad³

¹ At/Po.Khandala Tal. Khandala Dist. Satara Maharashtra.

E.mail: ravipawar27@gmail.com

² Gajendra classic apart.Yashwantnagar Wai Tal.Wai.Dist.Satara Maharashtra.

E.mail: rahultayade247@yahoo.com

³ At/Po Panchgani Tal. Mahableshwar Dist. Satara, Maharashtra.

Albinism is a genetically inherited condition in which a recessive gene that affects enzymes involved in the metabolism of pigment melanin inhibits its production. It results either in partial or complete loss of coloration from skin, eyes and feathers in birds (Mikkola, 2003) and scales as in fishes and reptiles (Sazima & Pombal, 1986). Albinism occurs in all the vertebrate groups including reptiles. Albinism is a form of hypo-pigmentary congenital disorder, characterized by lack of melanin pigment and an animal with such a condition could have either pure or partial albinism. Sazima & Pombal (1986) have stated that true albinos are recognized by their pinkish-yellowish body color and reddish eyes in life. Besides this there are other pigment abnormalities causing various color morphs and patterns in animals. In general, the cases of total (complete, true or pure) albinism are very rare in nature (Jadhav et al. 2014).

As far as Indian snakes are concerned in term of albinism no captive breeding data is available, whilst recently very few opportunistic rescued specimens were temporarily collected (Adimallaiah & Vyas, 2015; Hoshing et al., 2013; Jadhav et al., 2014 and Nivalkar et al., 2012). The genus *Coelognathus* is represented in India by three species and three sub species *C flavolineata* (Schlegel), *C. helena* (Daudin), *C. radiata* (Boie), *C. h. helena* (Daudin), *C. h. monticollaris* (Daudin) and *C. h. nigriangularis*. Mohapatra, et. al. The montane trinket *Coelognathus helena monticollaris* is mainly known from the Western Ghats and is reported from Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala (Whitaker & Captain 2008), in Central India from Amravati in Maharashtra (Nande & Deshmukh, 2007) and Kanha National Park, Madhya Pradesh (Thakur, 2011) and parts of Southern Eastern Ghats in Tamil Nadu (Ganesh & Arumugam, 2016).

On 27th Sept. 2016 Akshay Gaikwad and Pradeep Sonavane were on volunteer snake rescue call at Sidharth Nagar (N17.91433558, E73.80162979), a civilized area in Panchagani, Mahabaleshwar in western Maharashtra. They found an unusually coloured, medium sized snake, moving on a rocky surface. The specimen was lacking of any pigment and appears to be pink in color. The rescued snake was then safely brought to RP (first author) for further examination. After consulting Smith (1943), the scalation was matched and the snake was identified as *C. h. monticollaris*. The snake had red pigmentless eyes. Comparing the specimen with Whitaker and Captain (2004), it has dark yellow head and round spots, encircled with series of bracket shaped pigmentless scales. Whilst, the normal morph of this subspecies shows bands consisting of pale yellow, oval or round spots encircled with black borders which are usually black and white in normal form of subspecies. After scoring out the snake's lepidosis we found that the specimen was subadult having total length 358mm (SVL 298mm+ TL 60mm). Head length was measured 19 mm, Ventrals-222, Dorsals 24 and anal entire. After taking observation and photographs, the snake was released nearby.

Albinism in *Coelognatus helena* has only been reported once in India, which was in nominate subspecies i.e. *Coelognatus h. helena* and since there is no further information on albino records of the subspecies *Coelognatus h. monticollaris*, we found the observation noteworthy.

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