

First locality record of *Chrysopelea ornata* Shaw, 1802 Golden Tree or Gliding Snake from Kanger Valley National Park, District-Bastar, Chhattisgarh

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ABSTRACT

This study makes first precise locality record of a rare and Near Threatened species of reptile, the Golden Tree or Gliding Snake or Ornate Flying Snake *Chrysopelea Ornata* Shaw, 1802 from the Kanger Valley National Park (KVNP) of Bastar District of Chhattisgarh. This medium-sized slender and active arboreal snake is very handsome. It is one of the most spectacular snakes because of its ability to glide through the air. It is essentially an arboreal species which shows a marked preference for large trees and thick forests.

Key words: Snake; *Chrysopelea ornata*, rare species, Bastar Plateau, Chhattisgarh; KVNP

INTRODUCTION

I observed a few interesting species during herpatofaunal survey; one of them is identified as a rare and Near Threatened species of reptile, the Golden Tree or Gliding Snake *Chrysopelea Ornata*. I observed and photographed the specimen on 17th October 2015 at 12:00 hr at 18°53'18.9" N and 81°55'15.8" E in the KVNP of Bastar District of Chhattisgarh.

It is uncommon to be encountered near human habitation, but the presently reported snake was sighted on a medium-sized tree with some intertwining twiggy bushes around near an inhabited area of sparsely populated Kutumsar Forest Village of the KVNP of Bastar District of Chhattisgarh. This snake is locally known as Dhanupanti sanp.

Chrysopelea ornata is medium to long, slender and colorful snake. Dorsum light green with alternate black crossbars and reddish spots. Flattened head painted with black and yellow cross-bands. Snout is much depressed, broadly truncated. Underbelly light green, series of spots on side. Tail considerably long. Diurnal and arboreal. Extraordinary ability to 'glide' from higher to lower canopy by springing the body has earned it the English name. It feeds on geckos, lizard's frogs and small birds. Known to lay 6-12 elongated eggs during June-July. Rear-fanged. This species is considered mildly venomous, with no confirmed cases of medically significant envenomation. (Ahmed *et al.*, 2009).

Chrysopelea ornata has been recorded from the throughout Northeast India, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Orissa, Southern Gujrat, southern India and Western Ghats. (Ahmed *et al.*, 2009). Murthy (1986, 1990) first showed its distribution in Madhya Pradesh but did not mention a specific locality. Earlier reports (Agrawal 1981 and Chandra & Gajbe 2005) did not record the occurrence of this species in Central India. Ingle (2010), reported first precise locality record of *Chrysopelea ornata* from the Kheonae Wildlife Sanctuary of Dewas District of Madhya Pradesh. It may be noted that this species has been sighted in the Bailadila region of the Dantewada District of the Bastar Division also. (Gajendra H.K.S, pers. Comm, 2015).

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Material and Methods

The Kanger Valley National Park was declared by the Government of India in 1982 and name derived from the Kanger River located at 18° 45' 0" N & 82°10' 0" E. It is about 30Km away from Jagdalpur city towards south-east direction. The National Park is a long stretch of 34Km, spreading over an area of approximately 200Km². The landscape is highly heterogeneous and has hilly terrain - with low flat, gentle areas to steep slopes, plateaus, valleys, subterranean dissolution geomorphologic limestone caves and intersected with rivers and streams. The diverse habitats of the National Park help to sustain a large variety of flora and fauna as well and considered to be a hotspot of biodiversity in Central India. Most part of the National Park is Sal forest *Shorea robusta* with Saja tree, *Terminalia tomentosa* as co-species. However, the National Park is very interesting and peculiar as it is in the transition zone from Teak forest *Tectona grandis* to Sal forest *Shorea robusta*, highlighting the aspects of the ecological succession. The two forest types, viz. the Sal forest and the Teak forest, merge into one another forming an ecotone. The park has several temperate plant species including *Mallotus philippensis* and several fern species like the tree fern, *Cyathia spinulosa*. Ground flora is dominated by *Curcuma sp.* and *Amorphophallus poenifolius*. *Eupatorium odoratum* is the most prominent exotic, invasive plant species with more abundant in the periphery of the National Park.

From the faunal diversity aspect the number of large mammals seems to be low, while the numbers of birds and butterflies seems to be good and diversified which needs special attention for further scientific studies and conservation.

Results and Discussion

One of the mentioned species was sighted slithering over on a thick branch and gliding onto the tender twigs around and coming back to the thick branch and finally slipping into a deep crevice of the same tree. The time was about 12.00 Noon of the day at 18°53'18.9" N and 81°55'15.8" E. Photography and videography of the species was done during the same time. The sighting of the individual exemplified most of the morphological characters helpful for identification.

It was of pretty sizable length: about 4 Feet, slender and colorful. Dorsum light green with alternate black crossbars and large flower-shaped reddish vertebral spots. Flattened head painted with black and yellow cross-bands. Quite prominent and protruding eyes with round pupil. Snout was quite depressed and looked broadly truncated. Ventrals light green, series of spots on side. Tail considerably long as observed in the field and confirmed from photographs and the references (Daniel, J. C. 2002;

Whitaker, R. & Captain A. 2008; and Ahmed *et al.*, 2009).

Figure-1. Observed Golden Tree or Gliding Snake *Chrysopelea Ornata* on 17th October 2015 at 12:00 hr at 18°53'18.9" N and 81°55'15.8" E in the KVNPN of Bastar District of Chhattisgarh.



Kanger Valley National Park area is poorly surveyed in terms of faunal diversity. Recent surveys yielded significant results with report of Black-naped Oriole, Ruby-cheeked Sunbird (Chandra *et al.*, 2015), the rare bird Rufous-bellied Eagle (Dutta, 2015a) and the critically endangered sacred grove bush frog *Raorchestes sanctisilvaticus* (Dutta, 2015b) and the endangered bird species; *Gracula religiosa*

peninsularis, locally called as hill myna or the Bastar myna.

Hence it is presumed that systematic and long term, intensive survey in the area will result in finding more interesting species from Bastar plateau. Furthermore, action plans can be prepared for saving these conservation dependent species from the catastrophic habitat destruction.

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Conflict of Interests:

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

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