

First record of the Indian Egg-eater,
Elachistodon westermanni
REINHARDT, 1863,
from Karnataka, India

The Indian Egg-eater, *Elachistodon westermanni* REINHARDT, 1863, occurs in Bangladesh, India and Nepal (SRINIVASALU et al. 2013). Within India, the distribution of this colubrid snake is known from nine states, viz., Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Bihar, West Bengal, Punjab, Rajasthan and Telangana (Table 1) where this diurnal and semi-arboreal species inhabits both dry forests (e.g., thorny scrubland and deciduous forest) and moist broad-leaf forests (VYAS 2011; Table 1). *Elachistodon westermanni* exclusively feeds on bird eggs (DANDGE 2008). Considering its wide distribution within India and adaptation to life in a wide array of habitats, the species has been recognized as “Least Concern” (SRINIVASALU et al. 2013) although its rareness does not parallel this rating. The present note reports this very rarely encountered snake in the State of Karnataka at the southern distribution limit of the species.

On September 2, 2016, the authors found a roadkill of *E. westermanni* at Gonur village, Karnataka (14°14'23.85" N, 76°24'48.66" E) around 08:51 h (Fig. 1). Photographs of the snake were taken for scale count and later identification through the herpetologist Ashok Captain (Pune, India). The length of the snake (head heavily damaged) was measured before it was discarded. The identification was based on the following characteristics: seven or eight longitudinal dorsal scale rows on either body side, scales of mid-dorsal row enlarged, scales polygonal, five- or six-sided, subcaudals paired. A white vertebral stripe ran from neck to tip of the tail. Total length and snout-vent-length of the specimen were 48.7 cm and 43.7 cm, respectively.

The specimen was recovered from the state highway between Gonur Village and the town of Chitradurga. Two seasonal reservoirs surrounded by agricultural fields are the immediate habitats at the record site. The major vegetation type in the stretch is dry thorny scrub forests.

The review of existing literature for distribution of the species revealed that the species is sparsely recorded throughout

Table 1: Published locality records of *Elachistodon westermanni* REINHARDT, 1863, from the Indian sub-continent. The numbering of the localities corresponds to the numbers in Figure 2. NA – not available.

No.	Location, Country/State	Habitat	Reference	Observation date
1	Rangpur, Bangladesh	NA	REINHARDT (1863)	NA
2	Purnea, Bihar	NA	BLANFORD (1875)	NA
3	Jalpaiguri, West Bengal	NA	WALL (1913)	NA
4	Chitwan, Nepal	Heavy forest	FLEMING & FLEMING (1974)	Nov. 1964
5	Corbett National Park, Uttarakhand	NA	SHARMA (2003)	NA
6	Wardha, Maharashtra	Garden; degraded, dry scrub	CAPTAIN et al. (2005)	Aug. 03, 2003
7	Bhavnagar, Gujarat	Dry, thorny deciduous forest	VYAS (2006)	1989
8	Surat, Gujarat	Garden	VYAS (2006)	Aug. 2003
9	Amravati, Maharashtra	Scrub land	NANDE & DESHMUKH (2007)	July 20, 2005
10	Akola, Maharashtra	Dry deciduous forest	DANDGE (2008)	NA
11	Junagadh, Gujarat	Agricultural field	VYAS (2010)	Sep. 2007
12	Buldana, Maharashtra	Garden	NARAYANAN (2012)	NA
13	Amreli, Gujarat	Coastal degraded mixed forest; riverine habitat with agricultural fields	VYAS (2013)	July 15, 2011
14	Surendranagar, Gujarat	Dry thorny scrub	VYAS (2013)	Nov. 14, 2010
15	Hoshiarpur, Punjab	Mixed dry scrub	SHARMA (2014)	July 28, 2012
16	Shivpuri, Madhya Pradesh	Garden; thorny scrub forests	SHARMA (2014)	Sep. 02, 2012
17	Medak, Telangana	Thorny scrub	VISVANATHAN (2015)	Oct. 12, 2014
18	Belampalli, Telangana	Degraded dry deciduous forest	DANDGE & TIPLE (2016)	Jan. 20, 2014
19	Sawai Madhopur, Rajasthan	Agricultural land with seasonal canal	KHANDAL et al. (2016)	July 19, 2015
20	Chitradurga, Karnataka	Dry scrub, agricultural fields	This paper	Sep. 02, 2016



Fig. 1: Roadkill of *Elachistodon westermanni* REINHARDT, 1863, from between Gonor Village and the town of Chitradurga, State of Karnataka, India.

India (DANDGE & TIPLE 2016). Out of 20 available occurrence locations (Table 1), only two are from southern India, i.e., North

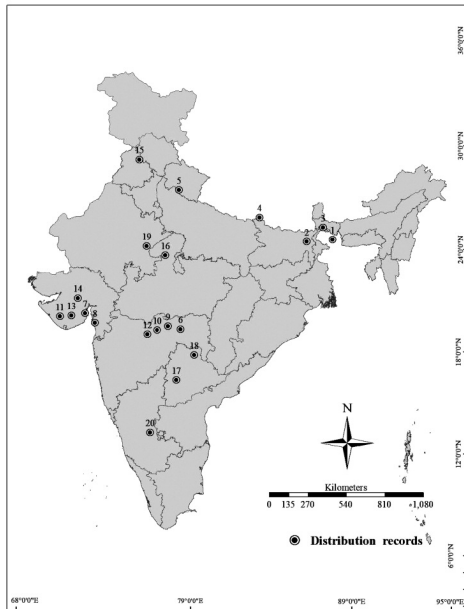


Fig. 2: Published distribution records of *Elachistodon westermanni* REINHARDT, 1863, from the Indian sub-continent. The numbering of the localities corresponds to the numbers in the first column of Table 1.

Telangana: Medak, 17°30'16" N, 78°17'18" E; 556 m a.s.l - VISVANATHAN (2015) and Belampalli, 19°4'17" N, 79°29'28" E - DANDGE & TIPLE (2016), the others refer to central, north-west and north-east Indian locations (VYAS 2013; SHARMA 2014; DANDGE & TIPLE 2016). The current record at Chitradurga district (No. 20 in Table 1 and Fig. 2) is the first record for the State of Karnataka and also the southernmost of the species in India. The nearest record from Medak in Northern Telangana, is located approximately 415 km northeast. Other near locations (Nos. 6, 9, 10, 12, 18 in Table 1 and Fig. 2) are situated in northeastern parts of the State of Maharashtra (DANDGE & TIPLE 2016).

Previously, it was thought that *E. westermanni* is restricted to northern and western India (SHARMA 2014) but the recent sightings of the species from southern Peninsular India (Telangana and Karnataka) indicate that the species could be widely distributed in India. Because of its cryptic nature and low abundance, it has been detected only very rarely. With respect to habitat use, SRINIVASALU et al. (2013) mentioned that it is adapted to live in various habitats, yet mostly recorded from human-associated habitats surrounded by dry scrub forests in India including the Himalayan foothills (Table 1). Further studies focusing on this rare and little known species are a

prerequisite to elucidate the ecology of *E. westermanni*.

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