

New locality records of Nagarjunsagar Racer, *Platyceps bholanathi*, Sharma 1976 from Tamil Nadu, southern India

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Introduction:

The elusive Nagarjunsagar Racer, *Platyceps bholanathi* (Sharma, 1976) (Wallach *et al.* 2014) is one of the least known, endemic colubrids found in the southern parts of India. Since its discovery in 1976 only few publications have contributed valuable information on its distribution, glimpses of its ecology and the comparison to its congener *Platyceps gracilis* (Günther, 1862). This species has been reported from four states (fig 2.), 1. Andhra Pradesh: Nagarjuna hills, Guntur district (Sharma, 1976, type locality); Kapilatheertham, Seshachalam hills, Chittoor

district (Guptha *et al.* 2013); Rishi valley, Madanapalle, Chittoor district (Deshwal and Becker 2017); 2. Telangana: Devarakonda, Nalgonda district (Ganesh *et al.*, 2013), Golconda fort complex, Hyderabad

(Seetharamaraju and Srinivasulu 2013); 3. Karnataka: Bellary Gudda, Bellary district (Sharma *et al.*, 2013); 4. Tamil Nadu: Thally, Hosur district (Ganesh *et al.* 2013); Gingee hills, Viluppuram district (Smart *et al.*, 2014); Sigur, Nilgiri district (Samson *et al.*, 2017).

Here we present the first reports of *Platyceps bholanathi* from two districts of Tamil Nadu, Padmapuram (13.0894°N, 79.4186°E, 347m



Fig 1. Dorsal view of a neonate *Platyceps bholanathi* (specimen 2), from Sanyasikundu foothills (11.6332°N, 78.1887°E 329m a.s.l), Salem district, Tamil Nadu. Photo by G.Melvinselvan

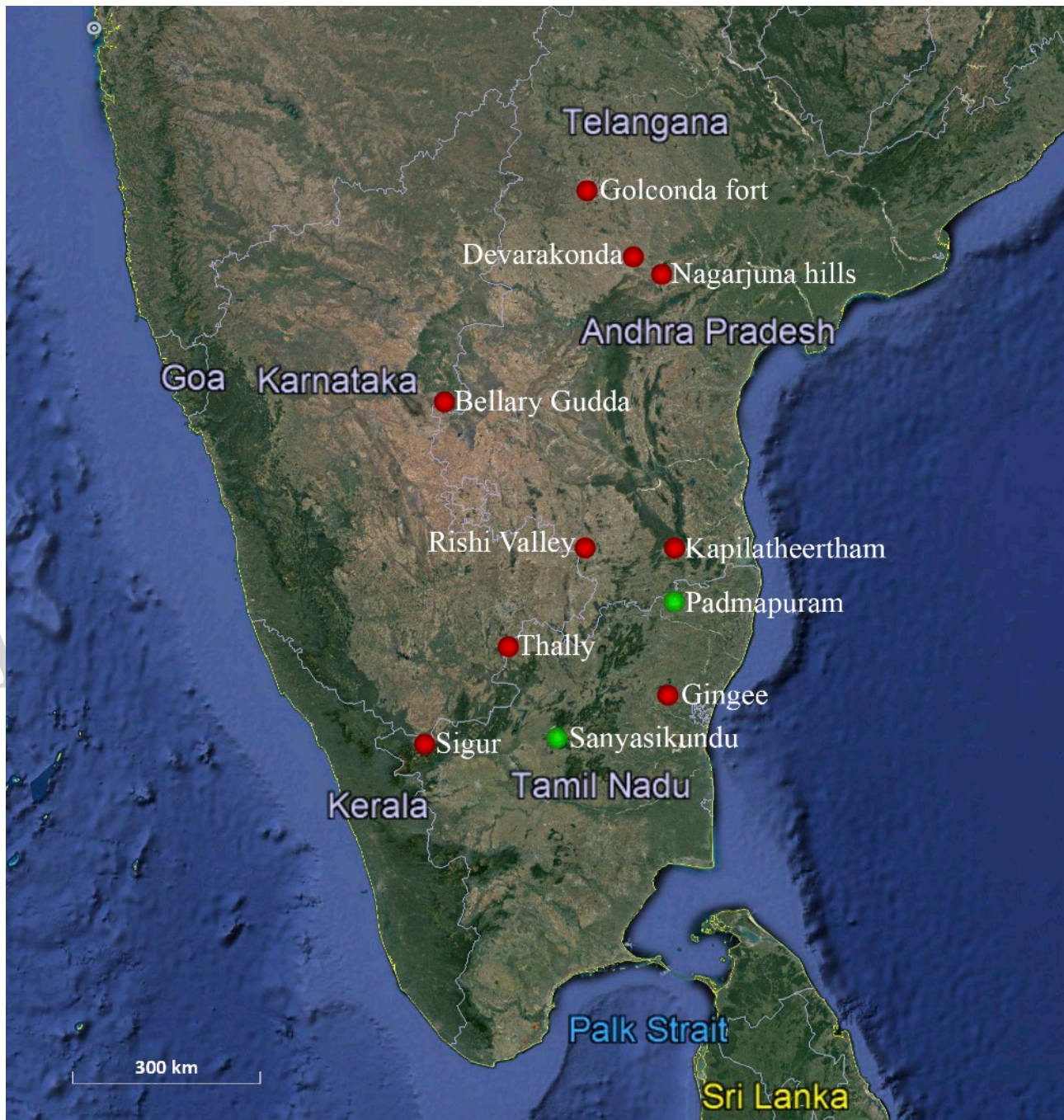


Fig 2. Distribution of *Platyceps bholanathi*, Red circles - existing records, Green circles - new records.

a.s.l) of Thiruvallur district and Sanyasikundu foothills (11.6332°N, 78.1887°E, 329m a.s.l) of Salem district.

Methods and materials:

Photographs were taken with Canon EOS 7d DSLR camera with a 100mm lens. The following data were collected: 1. Snout-vent length (SVL) and Tail length (TL) in cm, using measuring tape to the nearest 0.1cm, 2. Meristic data: Ventral scales were counted

according to Dowling (1951). Dorsal scales were counted according to Peters (1964), species identification keys were followed after Sharma *et al.*, 2013. The snakes were released back at same spot of capture after the data was collected.

Observation:

On 6th January 2017 at ca. 09.20 hrs in Padmapuram, the snake (specimen 1) was found basking on a boulder near Lakshmi

Narasimha Temple. The other snake (specimen 2) from the Sanyasikundu foothills was rescued on 8th December 2017 at ca. 17.40hrs, from a storage room of a local nursery. The habitats of both the locations comprise of rocky hillocks

with large boulders and loose rocks, with major vegetation being thorny shrubs, the climate being predominantly hot with low humidity.

Table 1. Morphometric and meristic features of the specimens, *P. bholanathi*

| | <u>Specimen 1</u> | <u>Specimen 2</u> |
|-------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| SVL | 47.0cm | 17.4cm |
| TL | 15.4cm, | 06.1cm |
| Sex | unsexed, | unsexed |
| Dorsal | 19:19:15 | 19:19:15 |
| Ventral | 209 | 211 |
| Subcaudal | 108 | 111 |
| Supralabial | 9, 5 th touching eyes | 9, 5 th touching eyes |
| Loreal | 1 | 1 |
| Preocular | 2 | 2 |
| Postocular | 2 | 2 |
| Temporal | 2+2 | 2+2 |
| Infralabial | 10 | 10 |

Discussion:

The current study contributes two more new locality records that are significant for future research and conservation efforts on the species and its preferred habitat as well. The snake sighted in Sanyasikundu foothills was the smallest (23.5 cm total length) recorded specimen so far, the earlier smallest record being 24.6cm found in September 2016 (Samson, 2017). These observations might suggest that the hatching occurs during or post monsoon (September – November). Further studies are required to gain knowledge on the natural history of this understudied, rare colubrid, especially on its reproduction.

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