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NOTE

BLACK-BELLIED CORAL SNAKE *SINOMICRURUS NIGRIVENTER* (WALL, 1908) (ELAPIDAE): AN EXTENDED DISTRIBUTION IN THE WESTERN HIMALAYA, INDIA

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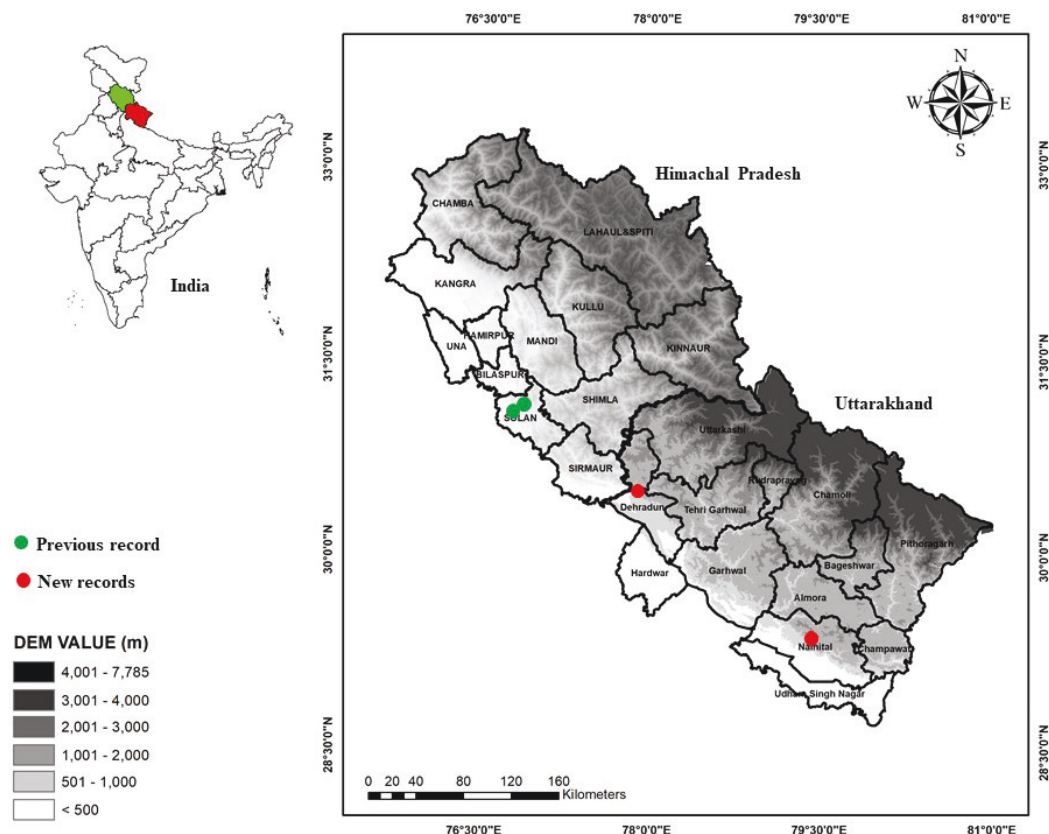


Figure 1. Distribution records of *Sinomicrurus nigriventer* in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand in the western Himalaya.

for the first time, two confirmed distributional records of *S. nigriventer* from the adjoining Himalayan state of Uttarakhand (Figure 1), extending the geographic range of this newly proposed species further south and east along the western Himalaya.

During recent field explorations in the Kumaon and Garhwal regions of this largely mountainous state, the authors recorded a dead and a live specimen each. A detailed scrutiny of literature such as Reinhardt (1844), Wall (1908), Whitaker & Captain (2004), and Mirza et al. (2020) along with morphological characteristics revealed that both these individuals belong to the *Elapidae* family of *Sinomicrurus* genus, namely, *S. nigriventer*.

The first observation consists of a dead specimen of *S. nigriventer* found on 11 August 2019 from Nainital Forest Division at an elevation of 1,113 m (29.343°N, 79.621°E). The specimen was found upturned by the side of a small foot-bridge crossing a flowing stream (Image 1). Judging from its intact body, and the fact that no rigor mortis had set in, it appeared that this black-bellied coral snake had died recently, but the cause of death could not be ascertained although ants were seen feeding on it. The specimen was collected, fixed and preserved in 70% ethanol and deposited in the museum

of the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun (WIIAD724). The total length of the snake recorded was 380 mm and tail length was 36 mm. The scale count of this specimen include dorsals 13:13:13, ventrals 231, sub-caudals 29 (paired), supralabials 7/7 and infralabials 7/7. The sighting location consisted of rocky slopes amidst riverside and major vegetation observed nearby were *Bauhinia vahlii*, *Debregeasia hypoleuca*, *Woodfordia fruticosa*, *Ricinus communis*, *Ageratina adenophora*, *Urtica dioica*, *Rubus ellipticus*, *Lantana camara*, and *Rumex nepalensis*.

The second, more recent observation consists of a live specimen of *S. nigriventer* encountered in the Bhadraj Block of Benog Wildlife Sanctuary (BWS) in Mussoorie Forest Division (Image 2). The snake was sighted on the way to Bhadraj temple (30.470°N, 77.970°E) during daylight (12:47 h) on 20 September 2020 at an elevation of 1,914 m. Information on the snake species was recorded, the snake was photographed and identified visually based on coloration and body pattern. BWS mainly constitutes of Ban oak *Quercus leucotrichophora* forest with dominant species such as *Rhododendron arboreum*, *Lyonia ovalifolia*, *Berberis* spp. and *Ageratina adenophora* and undulating terrain consisting of



Image 1. A dead individual of *Sinomicrurus nigriventer* found in Nainital Forest Division: A—ventral aspect | B—dorsal aspect. © Jignasu Dolia.

dense grassy slopes (Kumar et al. 2012). The area is characterized by small natural water catchments, although stagnant.

The first record of *S. nigriventer* is an important addition to the knowledge of medically important snakes of Uttarakhand. The recent specimen from Himachal Pradesh was reported from 870m elevation (Mirza et al. 2020) and the two specimens from Uttarakhand were found at 1,100m and 1,900m. Interestingly, both specimens were found during the monsoon period, which may suggest some seasonal activity pattern. Moreover, considering the limited distribution records of the Black-bellied Coral Snake from the western Himalaya, the current communication with a report on its occurrence in Nainital and Mussoorie forest divisions indicates that the cool sub-tropical and temperate forests (1,000–2,000 m) with dense grassy slopes are under-explored in terms of reptilian diversity. Further

field investigations are required to determine the status of this venomous snake and to investigate if the species also occurs in similar habitats of the western Himalaya.

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Image 2. *Sinomicrurus nigriventer* recorded in Benog Wildlife Sanctuary, Uttarakhand. © Vartika Chaudhary.

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