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Journal of Threatened Taxa

10.11609/jott.2026.18.6.29003-29158

www.threatenedtaxa.org

26 June 2026 (Online & Print)

18(6): 29003-29158

ISSN 0974-7907 (Online)

ISSN 0974-7893 (Print)



Open Access





ISSN 0974-7907 (Online); ISSN 0974-7893 (Print)

Publisher
Wildlife Information Liaison Development Society
www.wild.zooreach.org

Host
Zoo Outreach Organization
www.zooreach.org

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Cover: Nile Crocodile *Crocodylus niloticus* regulating body temperature on a warm day. Digital art on Procreate by © Aakanksha Komanduri.



Photographic record of the Eastern Bronzeback Tree Snake *Dendrelaphis cf. proarchos* (Wall, 1909) from Dudhwa Tiger Reserve, Uttar Pradesh, India

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The Eastern Bronzeback Tree Snake *Dendrelaphis proarchos* (Wall, 1909), is a species of diurnal, arboreal, colubrid snake found in northeastern India and adjacent regions of Indochina including Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam (Vogel & van Rooijen 2011). In India, the species has been reliably reported from several northeastern states, such as Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura, and West Bengal through museum and field records, western and central India (e.g., Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh) (Vogel & van Rooijen 2011; Biakzuala et al. 2022; Sharma & Verma 2023; Parmar et al. 2024; Mohandas & Dnyaneshwar 2025). While most Indian records from the northeastern India are in conformity with geographic range characterised by the taxonomic revision which revalidated *D. proarchos*,

some outlier records from central and western India have been considered of dubious, anthropogenic origin (Sharma & Verma 2023; Parmar et al. 2024; Mohandas & Dnyaneshwar 2025). A few reports of "*D. pictus*", an Indo-Malayan species (fide Vogel & van Rooijen 2011) from Nepal (Kästle et al. 2013; Rai et al. 2022) remain unverified, requiring confirmation of the presence of *D. proarchos* in central Himalaya and Shivalik landscape. In this study, we report a photographic record of *Dendrelaphis cf. proarchos* from Dudhwa Tiger Reserve, Uttar Pradesh, India.

The present record is a result of sustained field efforts by the authors in Dudhwa Tiger Reserve, wherein systematic biodiversity documentation across the reserve since 2022, comprising approximately 400 field-days and more than 2,400 person-hours

Editor: S.R. Ganesh, Kalinga Foundation, Agumbe, India.

Date of publication: 26 June 2026 (online & print)

Citation: Sainy, V.K., A. Jaseem, R. Ravi, A. Gupta, H.R. Mohan, R. Jagadeesh & K. Chaudhary (2026). Photographic record of the Eastern Bronzeback Tree Snake *Dendrelaphis cf. proarchos* (Wall, 1909) from Dudhwa Tiger Reserve, Uttar Pradesh, India. *Journal of Threatened Taxa* 18(6): 29150–29153. <https://doi.org/10.11609/jott.10510.18.6.29150-29153>

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Funding: Dudhwa Tiger Reserve, Uttar Pradesh Forest Department, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Competing interests: The authors declare no competing interests.

Acknowledgments: The author thanks the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve authorities and frontline forest staff for their support during field observations.



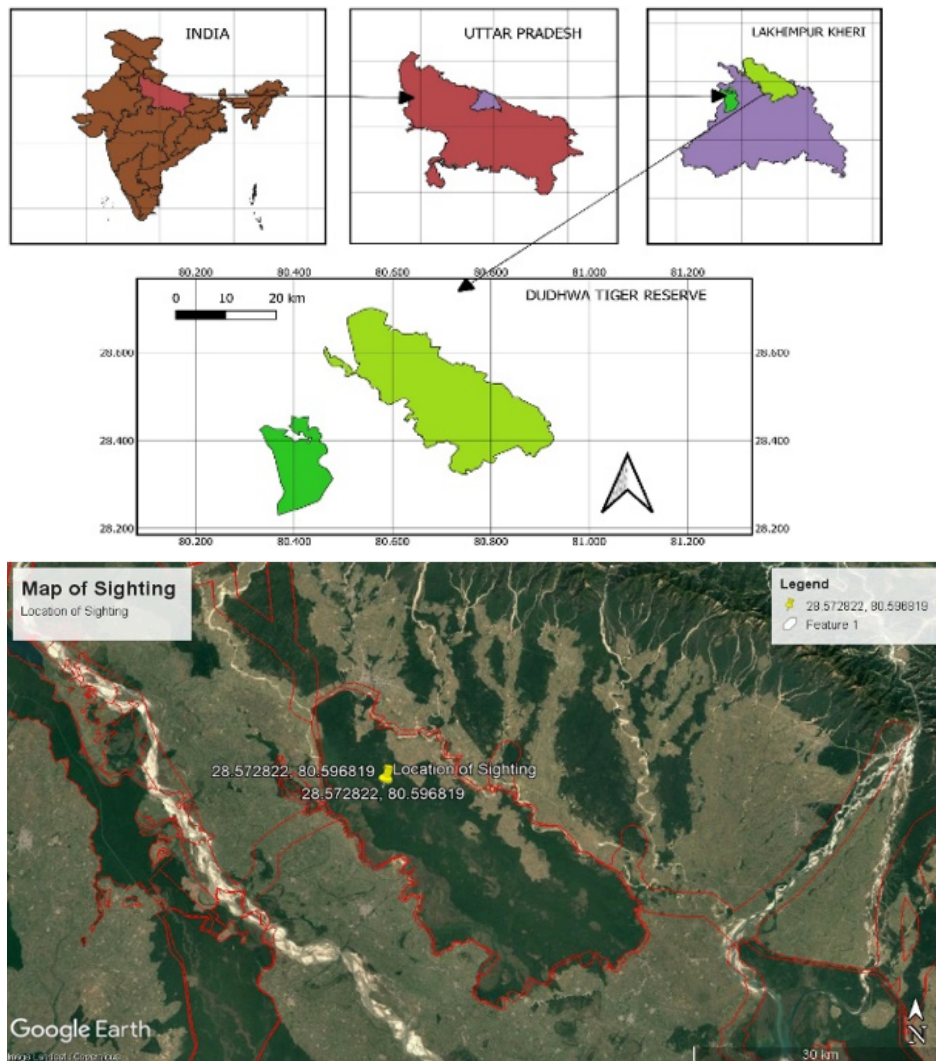


Image 1. Location map of *Dendrelaphis cf. proarchos* sighting in Dudhwa Tiger Reserve, Uttar Pradesh, India. (Source: QGIS Desktop 3.44.3; Google Earth).

of structured surveys have been carried out. These surveys were conducted across the core zone ranges of south Sonaripur, Kakrah, Dudhwa, Sathiana, and the Kishanpur Wildlife Sanctuary, using a combination of day and night transects, road-killed monitoring along the Dudhwa–Gauriphanta highway, camera trapping, and herpetological pitfall surveys. These efforts have yielded documented records of over 350 vertebrate species, including 58 reptile species. Despite this sustained effort, no live or dead specimen of any *Dendrelaphis* species had been encountered prior to 10 July 2025, underscoring the genuine rarity of the present record. The present observation was made during a routine patrol along Dudhwa–Gauriphanta forest road, which passes through the interior of the core zone and is primarily used for management and regulated vehicular movement.

On 10 July 2025, at 0930 h, during a field visit, a fresh, mildly trampled road-killed snake about 1 m long was observed on the Dudhwa–Gauriphanta road near Bankati–Piprola junction (28.572822° N, 80.596819° E; 205 m) in Palia, within the core area of Dudhwa Tiger Reserve (Image 1). The snake was photographed and then identified as an adult *Dendrelaphis cf. proarchos* (Wall, 1909) (Image 2). This photographic observation was posted on the iNaturalist citizen-science portal (<https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/334567974>). The mortality appeared accidental and was likely caused by vehicular impact, as suggested by visible tyre marks on the road surface, a common cause of snake mortality in forested landscapes (Kichloo et al. 2022). Although the mid-body region of the snake was damaged, the head, neck, and posterior portion remained intact,



Image 2. Road-killed *Dendrelaphis cf. proarchos* in Dudhwa Tiger Reserve, Uttar Pradesh, India, showing a— whole body | b—forebody | c—head profiles. © Vipin Kapoor Sainy.

allowing reliable identification. The specimen was photographed using a Canon EOS 200D Mark II camera with an 18–55 mm lens, and identification was confirmed using standard morphological characters described in authoritative taxonomic literature (Vogel & van Rooijen 2011; Biakzuala et al. 2022; Parmar et al. 2024). Modern herpetological studies increasingly emphasise the importance of photographic or specimen-based confirmation for validating species distribution records (Uetz et al. 2023). However, we were unable to collect or deposit the specimen as a voucher due to prevailing legal stipulations. But the present study documented the photographic evidence of *Dendrelaphis cf. proarchos* from Uttar Pradesh.

Identification of the Dudhwa specimen as *Dendrelaphis cf. proarchos* was based on (Wall 1909; Vogel & van Rooijen 2011, Biakzuala et al. 2022): slender, elongated body with a head broader than neck, large eyes with round pupils, dorsum bronze-brown with a thick black lateral stripe along the body, bordered below by yellowish-white, and further below by a thin black lateral stripe, smooth dorsal scales arranged obliquely, with enlarged vertebral scales, black post-ocular stripe, venter pale yellowish to cream, sometimes with ventrolateral light stripes bordered by darker lines,

loreal 1, preocular 1, postoculars 2, supralabials 8–9 (5th, 6th contacting eye). It is not *D. biloreatus* as it has a single loreal on each side, not *D. cyanochloris* as it has thick black side stripes throughout the trunk and not *D. tristis* as it has lateral black side stripes (Biakzuala et al. 2022). The specimen does not depict any feature not diagnostic of *D. proarchos*. Ventral, subcaudal and dorsal row counts of this specimen are needed for confirming identification and hence we conservatively report it as *D. cf. proarchos*.

Distribution records of *Dendrelaphis cf. proarchos* in India have been refined through successive faunal surveys and taxonomic revisions (Wall 1909; Wallach et al. 2014). Within India, the species has been reliably reported from several northeastern states, such as Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura, and West Bengal through museum, snake rescues and field records, from parts of western and central India (e.g., Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh) (Vogel & van Rooijen 2011; Biakzuala et al. 2022; Sharma & Verma 2023; Parmar et al. 2024; Mohandas & Dnyaneshwar 2025). While recent morphological and molecular studies have confirmed the validity of *Dendrelaphis proarchos* from northeast India (Mizoram) and reassigned earlier northern Indian

records of *D. pictus* to *D. proarchos* (Vogel & van Rooijen 2011), the present record from Dudhwa Tiger Reserve represents the first confirmed occurrence of this species from the Terai landscape of Uttar Pradesh, significantly extending its known distribution westwards by nearly 900 airline km, from the nearest place Darjeeling. Previous studies from Uttar Pradesh, including Dudhwa, have only reported *D. tristis* (Das et al. 2012; Boruah et al. 2020). This shows that similar species are present in the region, but there has been no record of *D. proarchos* before this study.

Patterns of range expansion in snakes are increasingly being recognised across Indian subcontinent. For example, *Ahaetulla longirostris* was described from Bihar and Meghalaya (Mirza et al. 2024), but later records have indicated a range extension, including reports from the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve. Similarly, *Trimeresurus salazar* was originally described from the eastern Himalayan region of Arunachal Pradesh, India (Mirza et al. 2020), but later studies have reported it from more areas, such as central India, showing a westward range extension (Vogel et al. 2022). Similarly, *Trimeresurus erythrurus*, historically known from parts of northeastern India and adjacent Indochina, has also witnessed range updates in recent years, with new distributional records emerging from eastern peninsular India (Deuti et al. 2021). Such examples highlight that cryptic, arboreal, snakes often have wider range extensions than previously documented, particularly in under surveyed regions. Therefore, the present record of *Dendrelaphis* cf. *proarchos* from Dudhwa Tiger Reserve may represent a similar pattern of natural distributional expansion rather than an isolated or human-mediated occurrence (Parmar et al. 2024). As the record originates from the core forest area of a Tiger Reserve, chances of human-mediated introduction is very minimal, if not nil. This record further highlights the underexplored reptile diversity of the Terai Arc Landscape (Das et al. 2012; Boruah et al. 2020; Hakim & Ashar 2025) and underscore the conservation value of Dudhwa Tiger Reserve for both well-known and cryptic species.

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Print copies of the Journal are available at cost. Write to:
The Managing Editor, JoTT,
c/o Wildlife Information Liaison Development Society,
3A2 Varadarajulu Nagar, FCI Road, Ganapathy, Coimbatore,
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ISSN 0974-7907 (Online) | ISSN 0974-7893 (Print)

June 2026 | Vol. 18 | No. 6 | Pages: 29003–29158

Date of Publication: 26 June 2026 (Online & Print)

DOI: 10.11609/jott.2026.18.6.29003-29158

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