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No. 12, Thiruvannamalai Nagar, Saravanampatti - Kalapatti Road, Saravanampatti,  
Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu 641035, India

Ph: +91 9385339863 | [www.threatenedtaxa.org](http://www.threatenedtaxa.org)

Email: [sanjay@threatenedtaxa.org](mailto:sanjay@threatenedtaxa.org)

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continued on the back inside cover

Cover: *Geodorum laxiflorum* Griff.—inflorescence (Orchidaceae) © Ashish Ravindra Bhojar.



## Reply to the “Correction to Catalogue of herpetological specimens from Meghalaya, India at the Sálím Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON)” by P. Karthik

S.R. Chandramouli<sup>1</sup> , R.S. Naveen<sup>2</sup> , S. Sureshmarimuthu<sup>3</sup> , S. Babu<sup>4</sup> , P.V. Karunakaran<sup>5</sup>  & Honnavalli N. Kumara<sup>6</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Department of Ecology and Environmental Sciences, School of Life Sciences, Pondicherry University, Puducherry 605014, India.

<sup>2–6</sup> Sálím Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, Anaikatty, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu 641108, India.

<sup>1</sup> findthesnakeman@gmail.com (corresponding author), <sup>2</sup> naveen89240@gmail.com, <sup>3</sup> mailme.sureshmarimuthu@gmail.com,

<sup>4</sup> sanbabs@gmail.com (corresponding author), <sup>5</sup> karunakaran.pv@gmail.com, <sup>6</sup> honnavallik@gmail.com

In a recent issue of the Journal of Threatened Taxa, we published a catalogue of herpetofaunal specimens collected from Meghalaya as a part of an on-going project entitled “Characterization of Community Reserves and Assessment of their Conservation Values in Meghalaya” (Chandramouli et al. 2021a).

Strangely, Karthik (2021) has ‘reacted’ to our publication with a ‘corrigendum’ with claims of “imprecise and misleading information” having been presented. Therefore, we are constrained to respond to his allegations in this publication. In principle, errata and corrigenda are published either by the authors of a publication (us) or the publisher (JoTT, in this case). Therefore, Karthik (2021) is not entitled to be titled as a corrigendum to the article that the author was not a part of. To begin with, the author P. Karthik (hereafter PK), who was hired on a temporary basis as a Junior Research Biologist for this project, collected a part of the specimens presented in the catalogue (Chandramouli et al. 2021a) and was initially invited to be a co-author, when the publication was conceived. However, PK voluntarily declined to be a part of this exercise with a request to remove his name from the authors list. His decision was respected by the other principal investigators. We hereby convey the fact that for the publication of another article (Chandramouli et al. 2021b) from the same project, involving the same team, PK was also a co-author (Chandramouli et al., 2021a). Had he not declined our offer of co-authorship for the publication on the catalogue (Chandramouli et al. 2021b), he would have been a part of this publication as well. It is unreasonable on the part of PK to accuse and relegate the efforts of Chandramouli et al. (2021b) in his response. We present our arguments for his allegations

below in a point-wise manner:

1. “Recent, Chandramouli et al. (2021b) have discussed merely handy specimens, but many more have yet to be documented (Ganesh et al. 2020 and Karthik pers. com.). SACON - Sálím Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History now houses about 200 species of the herpetological collection.” (sic.)

**Response:** The title of our article “Catalogue of herpetological specimens from Meghalaya, India at the Sálím Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON)” clearly states that we are dealing only with the herpetological collections from the state of Meghalaya and not the rest.

2. “As it is catalogued and the specimens are vouchered for future studies, therefore the author ought to disclose the SACON accreditation for upholding a large number of specimens.” (sic.)

**Response:** PK himself was a co-author in Ganesh et al. (2020) cataloguing a part of the collections at SACON and hence, the above statement is self-contradictory. The specimens were collected with

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proper permits from the state forest department of Meghalaya. It is an on-going study and hence, all the collected specimens are under the custody of SACON. In future if any taxonomic work on these specimens is addressed then those specimens will be deposited in an accredited repository.

3. The author stated the collector name P. Karthik (instead of Pandi Karthik). The collector name is not included as an author and does not need to be abbreviated; rather, it should be the academic name.

**Response:** The author (PK) himself has published articles (Ganesh et al., 2020; Chandramouli et al., 2021a) as “P. Karthik” and the same has been followed here. In addition, the official records submitted to SACON by him mentions his name as “P. Karthik”. Moreover, it is immaterial and inconsequential to expand his first name, as long as he has been credited for the collection (see Acknowledgements in Chandramouli et al. 2021b).

4. Furthermore, the author failed to follow the word-uniformity (i.e.) on species location and specimen voucher number; a few places the specimen voucher number comes along with institute acronyms (i.e., SACON VA 102) and someplace it does not (i.e., VA 72 & 73).

**Response:** As the publication deals with the collections from Meghalaya at SACON, it is not necessary to repeat the institutional acronym SACON in each entry and whether or not to mention it is solely at the discretion of the authors and the journal format. To substantiate this, we point out that Karthik (2021) himself mentions the voucher numbers of certain samples e.g. *Calotes cf. irrawadi* as “SACON VR 205, VR 240, VR 245”, wherein, VR 240, VR 245 do not bear the prefix SACON, and is presumed to be understood.

5. Also, a paucity of information on preservation methods and collection permit information (follow Al-Razi et al. 2021 & Mirza et al. 2021). As a concurring collector, the specimens were fixed in 7 % formaldehyde solution and later stored in 75 % ethanol. A few specimens of tail tip tissues were preserved in 95% ethanol for molecular work prior to specimen fixation (Mirza et al. 2021). For future taxonomical investigation, the specimens and tissue samples have been deposited in *Sálim Ali Centre for Ornithology & Natural History* (SACON).

**Response:** The concerned authorities: i.e., the

Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) and Chief Wildlife Warden (CWLW), Meghalaya, and officers of the Forest and Environment Department, Government of Meghalaya have been duly acknowledged in our publication for according permits for the study, based on which P. Karthik and other researchers of this project were permitted to visit and collect data / specimens from Meghalaya. It is to be noted that the permission was given to the project. In fact, it is to be questioned as to how Karthik (2021) can be published since the scientist to whom permission was granted does not feature in Karthik (2021). The information on whether or not tissues have been extracted and stored at SACON is irrelevant and unnecessary for this publication.

6. Locality information of *Microhyla berdmorei* (SACON VA 102) *Minervarya sengupti* (VA 89, 97), *Limnonectes khasianus* (VA 68), *Hemidactylus frenatus* (VR 222), *Hemidactylus* sp. (VR 171), *Gekko gekko* (VR 229), *Calotes cf. irawadi* (VR 205, VR 240-245), *Calotes emma* (VR 150, 151), *Cristidorsa planidorsata* (VR 185 and VR 169), *Ptyctolaemus gularis* (VR 238-239, VR 207, VR 201), *Sphenomorphus* sp. (VR 227), *Argyrophis diardi* (VR 187, VR 223), *Indotyphlops* sp. (VR 219), *Psammodynastes pulverulentus* (VR 152), *Lycodon* sp. (VR 213, VR 215), *Oligodon juglandifer* (VR 124), *Boiga gocool* (VR 190, VR 192), *Dendrelaphis proarchos* (VR 210), *Coelognathus radiatus* (VR 189), *Elaphe cantoris* (VR 211), *Pareas monticola* (VR 212), *Hebius khasiense* (VR 209, VR 225, VR 246), *Fowlea piscator* (VR 202, 203), *Sinomicrurus maclellandi* (VR 159), *Naja kaouthia* (VR 157) and *Ophiophagus hannah* (VR 252) and *Trimeresurus* sp. (VR 160).

**Response:** Despite being aware of the information on their origin, PK has neither documented and submitted this information to the project PIs, nor informed us when the first draft of the catalogue was shared with him while inviting him to be a co-author. It is unjust and unfair on the part of PK, engaged as a Junior Research Biologist, to have deliberately concealed all this information from the PIs and to raise a query on their origin now, after publication. Nevertheless, as fellow scientists, we are happy that PK has managed to furnish this vital information at least now that we take to be good for the larger benefit of science.

7. “*Theioderma cf. albopunctatum*

Location: SACON VA 88, VA 69 - an unsexed juvenile from Selbalgre and adult female from Raid Nongbri

(coll. Pandi Karthik).

Comment: The author referred (SACON VA 88, VA 96) as *Theلودerma baibungense*. I again refer (SACON VA 88, VA 96) as a *Theلودerma cf. albopunctatum*. Because, the species resemble to *T. cf. albopunctatum* based on its morphometric characters and other information provided (Mian et al. 2017). Also, conferring the geographic proximity and the species complicity in the molecular nest. Therein, I refer to the species again as *T. cf. albopunctatum*. Additionally, an integrated taxonomic approach would be detrimental in resolving species-level complicity.”

**Response:** Frost (2021), under the accounts of *Theلودerma albopunctatum* states that “populations from northeastern India, Myanmar, to and including Thailand are provisionally attached to this species but likely represent a complex of unnamed species”. Therefore, we disagree with the unsubstantiated claims made by Karthik (2021) who failed to fully substantiate his claims by describing the specimens.

8. “*Oligodon cinereus* (Günther, 1864)

Location: SACON VR 214 – unsexed adult from Daribokgre, Meghalaya (coll. Pandi Karthik).

Comment: The author has named SACON VR 214 as an *Oligodon juglandifer*, but it is not. The unsexed adult road crush specimen was identified as an *Oligodon cinereus*.”

**Response:** Karthik (2021) without any idea of the specimen in question makes an emphatic, premature statement on the identity of SACON VR 214. The road-killed *O. cinereus* which he states to be from Daribokgre, is presently not traceable in the collections and VR 214, which is a totally different specimen has been identified by us as *O. juglandifer*.

9. “*Dendrelaphis proarchos* (Wall, 1909)

Comment: The author had stated the specimen SACON VR 210 - adult from Meghalaya (coll. Pandi Karthik). No such specimen was collected by Pandi Karthik from the genus ‘*Dendrelaphis*’, nevertheless,

the author may have been misinformed because one sample from the genus *Dendrelaphis* sp. is available at SACON that perhaps collected from the Anaikatty”. Response: Perhaps the collector information could have been misconstrued. But yet, we could not help ourselves but to wonder, how could PK comment so emphatically about the provenance of a specimen that he himself states to not have collected. Moreover, there has been a team of seven members involved in the project who were at Meghalaya, one of whom could have been its collector.

In conclusion, it is apparent that the intentions of Karthik (2021) have just been defamation of the article published by Chandramouli et al. (2021b) which he voluntarily declined to be a part of. Our explanations clearly point at the personal lamentations rather than scientific concerns of Karthik (2021). We strongly discourage such unethical practices in scientific forums.

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#### Article

**Distribution, diet, and trophic level of *Arvicanthus abyssinicus* and *Tachyoryctes splendens* around the area of recently extinct Ethiopian Wolf *Canis simiense* on Mount Guna, northwestern Ethiopia**

– Hirpasa Teressa, Wondimu Ersino & Tadele Alemayo, Pp. 20539–20549

#### Communications

**Seasonal composition of avian communities in different habitats of Harike Wetland, a Ramsar site in Punjab, India**

– Jagdeep Singh & Onkar Singh Brraich, Pp. 20550–20565

**Temporal changes in species richness of waterfowl (Anseriformes) community in D’Ering Memorial Wildlife Sanctuary, Arunachal Pradesh, India**

– Tapak Tamir & Daniel Mize, Pp. 20566–20575

**Reptilian assemblages in the wetlands of Amboli hill complex, northern Western Ghats, Maharashtra, India during the monsoon season**

– Sachinkumar R. Patil & Kiran Choudaj, Pp. 20576–20583

**Butterfly diversity and composition at Chemerong Amenity Forest, Terengganu, Malaysia**

– Muhammad Hafiz Sulaiman, Abdul Munir Mohd Zaki, Geok Chin Yap, Nur Atiqah Aniruddin & Ju Lian Chong, Pp. 20584–20596

**Ecological niche modeling for reintroduction and conservation of *Aristolochia cathcartii* Hook.f. & Thomson (Aristolochiaceae), a threatened endemic plant in Assam, India**

– Bhaskar Sarma & Bhaben Tanti, Pp. 20597–20605

**New host plant records of Fig Wax Scale *Ceroplastes rusci* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Hemiptera: Coccoomorpha: Coccidae) from India**

– Arvind Kumar & Renu Pandey, Pp. 20606–20614

**Seasonal variations influencing the abundance and diversity of plankton in the Swarnamukhi River Estuary, Nellore, India**

– Krupa Ratnam, V.P. Limna Mol, S. Venkatnarayanan, Dilip Kumar Jha, G. Dharani & M. Prashanthi Devi, Pp. 20615–20624

#### Short Communications

**First record of *Prosopeonoides* Millidge & Russell-Smith, 1992 (Araneae: Linyphiidae) from India, with the description of a new species**

– Anusmitha Domichan & K. Sunil Jose, Pp. 20625–20630

**Rediscovery of *Platerus pilcheri* Distant (Hemiptera: Reduviidae), a forgotten assassin bug from India, with comments on its range extension**

– H. Sankararaman, Anubhav Agarwal, Valérie A. Lemaître & Hemant V. Ghate, Pp. 20631–20636

**First Indian DNA barcode record for the moth species *Pygospila tyres* (Cramer, 1780) (Lepidoptera: Crambidae: Spilomelinae) distributed in Asia and Australia**

– Aparna S. Kalawate, A. Shabnam & K.P. Dinesh, Pp. 20637–20642

**First record and description of female *Onomarchus leuconotus* (Serville, 1838) (Insect: Orthoptera: Tettigoniidae) from peninsular India**

– Sunil M. Gaikwad, Yogesh J. Koli & Gopal A. Raut, Pp. 20643–20647

**New records of odonates (Insecta: Odonata), *Archibasis oscillans* Selys, 1877 and *Merogomphus tamaracherriensis* Fraser, 1931 from Maharashtra, India**

– Akshay Dalvi & Yogesh Koli, Pp. 20648–20653

**A checklist of dragonflies & damselflies (Insecta: Odonata) of Kerala, India**

– Sujith V. Gopalan, Muhamed Sherif & A. Vivek Chandran, Pp. 20654–20665

***Aldama macbridei* (Heliantheae: Compositae): notes on its distribution and vulnerable habitats in central Peru**

– Daniel B. Montesinos-Tubée & Federico García-Yanes, Pp. 20666–20671

**Lichens and animal camouflage: some observations from central Asian ecoregions**

– Mahmood Soofi, Sandeep Sharma, Barbod Safaei-Mahroo, Mohammad Sohrabi, Moosa Ghorbani Organli & Matthias Waltert, Pp. 20672–20676

#### Notes

**First photographic evidence of Asiatic Black Bear *Ursus thibetanus* in Kaziranga Tiger Reserve, India**

– Priyanka Borah, Jyotish Ranjan Deka, Mujahid Ahamad, Rabindra Sharma, Ruchi Badola & Syed Ainul Hussain, Pp. 20677–20679

**First record of Small Minivet *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus* (Aves: Passeriformes: Campephagidae) from Kashmir, India**

– Zakir Hussain Najjar, Bilal A. Bhat & Riyaz Ahmad, Pp. 20680–20682

***Cotesia anthelae* (Wilkinson, 1928) (Hymenoptera: Braconidae) a natural parasitoid of *Cirrochroa thais* (Fabricius, 1787) (Lepidoptera: Nymphalidae), first report from the Oriental region**

– Ankita Gupta & P. Manoj, Pp. 20683–20685

***Melastoma imbricatum* Wall. ex Triana (Melastomataceae): a new addition to the flora of Manipur, India**

– Rajkumari Jashmi Devi, Deepashree Khuraijam, Peimichon Langkan & Biseshwori Thongam, Pp. 20686–20688

***Geodorum laxiflorum* Griff. (Orchidaceae), a new distribution record for Maharashtra state of India**

– Ashish Ravindra Bhojar, Swapnil Nandgawe, Syed Abrar Ahmed & Saduram Madavi, Pp. 20689–20691

**Photographic record of *Armillaria mellea* a bioluminescent fungi from Lonavala in Western Ghats, India**

– Swanand R. Patil & Shubham V. Yadav, Pp. 20692–20694

#### Response & Reply

**Correction to Catalogue of herpetological specimens from Meghalaya, India at the Sálím Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON)**

– Pandi Karthik, Pp. 20695–20697

**Reply to the “Correction to Catalogue of herpetological specimens from Meghalaya, India at the Sálím Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON)” by P. Karthik**

– S.R. Chandramouli, R.S. Naveen, S. Sureshmarimuthu, S. Babu, P.V. Karunakaran & Honnavalli N. Kumara, Pp. 20698–20700

#### Book Review

**Conservation Kaleidoscope: People, Protected Areas and Wildlife in Contemporary India**

– L.A.K. Singh, Pp. 20701–20702

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