

**NOTES ON THE OCCURRENCE OF THE SEA SNAKES,  
*HYDROPHIS MAMILLARIS* (DAUDIN) AND  
*MICROCEPHALOPHIS GRACILIS* (SHAW) FROM WEST BENGAL**

**ABSTRACT**

Two species of sea snakes, *Hydrophis mamillaris* (Daudin) and *Microcephalophis gracilis* (Shaw) have been recorded for the first time from the West Bengal Coast, India. A brief taxonomic note on the zoogeographical distribution of these two species has also been presented in this communication.

DURING the course of our studies on the unnamed collections of sea snakes present in the Zoological Survey of India, Calcutta three well-preserved specimens of sea snakes from West Bengal belonging to *Hydrophis mamillaris* (Daudin) and *Microcephalophis gracilis* (Shaw) were discovered. The present communication reports these sea snakes for the first time from the West Bengal Coast, India.

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### ***Hydrophis mamillaris* (Daudin) (Broad-banded sea snake)**

*Anguis mamillaris* Daudin, 1803. *Hist. Nat. Rept.*, 7 : 340 (based on Russell, 1 : 49, pl. 44 ; type loc. Vizagapatnam).

*Material* : 1 ex., juv., Digha (West Bengal), 4.ix.1964, coll. A. K. Datta ; ZSI Reg. No. 22671.

*Measurements* : Total length 620 mm ; standard length 550 mm ; tail 70 mm.

*Pholidosis and diagnosis* : 9 maxillary teeth beyond poison fang ; head small, body slender anteriorly and much compressed posteriorly, greatest diameter more than 5.0 of neck ; eye moderate ; 1 pre- and 2 postoculars ; temporals 2, anterior being superposed ; 7 supralabials, 2nd well in contact with prefrontal, 3rd and 4th touching eye, last 3 very small ; 4 infralabials in contact with genials ; a small scale at oral margin between 3rd and 4th infralabials ; 27 scale rows on neck, 36 on body ; ventrals 324 distinct throughout, bicarinate, not twice as broad as adjacent scales.

*Colour in alcohol* : Yellowish or grayish, with 54 broad black bands on body, about twice as broad as interspaces, slightly expanded dorsally and connected along line of ventrals ; head black with yellow streak on temporal region.

*Distribution* : *Hydrophis mamillaris* has earlier been reported from Cambay, Bombay and Vizagapatnam within the Indian faunal limits (Smith, 1923; 1943) who considered this species 'to be practically rare and (is) hitherto known only by 13 specimens'. The present record extends the known range of its distribution further north-eastwards.

### ***Microcephalophis gracilis* (Shaw) (John's sea snake)**

*Hydras gracilis* Shaw, 1802 : *Gen. Zool.*, 3 : 560 (type loc. ? ; type : in Brit. Mus. (N.H.), London).

*Material* : 2 ex., 1 juv. Digha (West Bengal), 3. ix. 1964. coll. A. K. Datta ; Z.S.I. Reg. No. 22673 ; 1 ♂, Sandhead, mouth of the river Hooghly, Sundarbans (West Bengal), 1924, coll. P. V. Lady Fraser ; Z.S.I. Reg. No. 22522.

*Measurements* : Standard lengths 305 mm, 540 mm ; total lengths 335 mm, 610 mm and tail 30 mm, 70 mm respectively.

*Pholidosis and diagnosis* : Head very small, body long and very slender anteriorly, much compressed posteriorly, its greatest diameter being more than 4.0 of neck ; snout not projecting beyond lower jaw ; eye moderate ; rostral comparatively large extending well on to upper surface of snout ; frontal small, shorter than its distance from rostral ; 1 pre- and 1 postocular ; 1 anterior temporal followed by another large scale ; 6 supralabials 2nd in contact with prefronta 1, 3rd and 4th touching eye ; 4 infralabials, in contact with genials ; no small scale at oral margin

between infralabials. 19 scale-rows on neck, 33 on body with 3 very small and indistinct tubercles; ventrals 239, entire on slender part of body and broader than adjacent dorsal scales, being completely divided by median furrow; preanals feebly enlarged.

*Colour in alcohol*: The juvenile specimen is black above which a series of whitish dorsal bands on slender part of body and rather complete bands posteriorly, 45 in total number. Adult specimen grayish above, pale below with bars or bands indistinctly marked particularly on thickest part of body.

*Distribution*: *Microcephalophis gracilis* is known to range from the Persian Gulf to southern coast of China and the coastal zones of Australia (Smith, 1943). Smith (1926) recorded it from Gopalpur (Orissa) and Tamil Nadu Coasts. Wall (1906, 1909) attributes that *M. gracilis* is moderately common on the Malabar and Coromandal Coasts, while de Rooij (1917) recorded the species from Patani and Singgora in the Gulf of Thailand, from the Straits of Hainan and Macao in southern China and from Borneo in the Malay Archipelago.

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