



BOAS OF THE WORLD

EDITED BY R. GRAHAM REYNOLDS & ROBERT W. HENDERSON

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Robert W. Henderson and R. Graham Reynolds



Figure 9.47. Adult *Eryx whitakeri*, in dorsolateral view. Kerala, India. Photograph by Indraneil Das.

ERYX WHITAKERI Das 1991b

—Whitaker's Boa, Western India Sandboa

INDRANEIL DAS

Taxonomy

Eryx whitakeri was described by Das (1991b) from localities on the southwest coast of India. The type series include ZSI 24810 (holotype) from "Mangalore, Karnataka State, India" (current name, Mangaluru, 12.8855°N, 74.8388°E), and paratypes include ZSI 24811 from "Cannanore (current name Kannur), Kerala State, India" (11.8705°N, 75.3678°E); ZSI 24813 from "Felneer Hostel, Mangalore, Karnataka State, India" (current name, Felnir in Mangaluru, 13.4333°N, 75.0000°E); ZSI 22152 from "Panjim sea beach, 29 km west of Ponda, Goa" (15.5010°N, 73.294°E). No generic reallocations have been attempted. The species was previously reported as a hybrid between *Eryx conicus* and *E. johnii* by Khaire and Khaire (1986, 1987).

Type Specimens and Genomic Resources

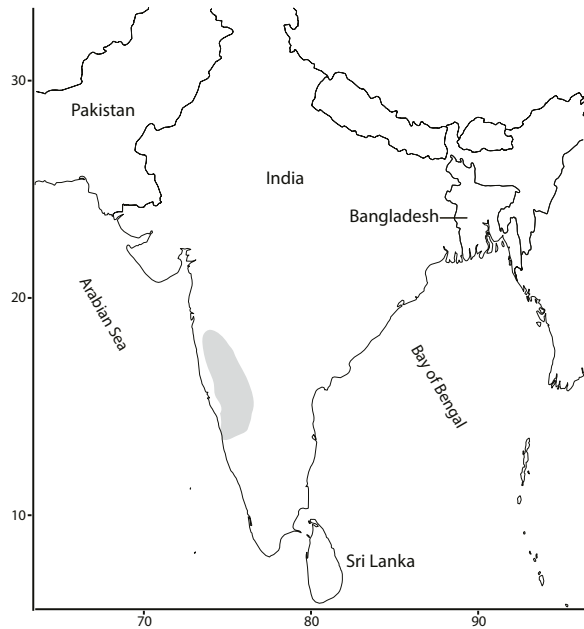
See the Taxonomy section for a description of types. There are no genomic resources available for this species.

Etymology

The species name honors Romulus Earl Whitaker (b. 1943), an Indian herpetologist and conservation documentary maker. The only vernacular name known, spoken by native speakers of Kannada (a Dravidian language spoken in Karnataka state of southern India), is Irr Thale, meaning "two-headed."

Description

This species is a small, stout, and cylindrical snake (Figs. 9.47, 9.48) characterized by smooth dorsal scales; head weakly distinct from neck; a broad, depressed snout; chin lacking mental groove; slit-like nostrils; reduced eyes; vertically elliptical pupils; small scales on forehead, only slightly larger than the dorsal scales; described as unkeeled (Das 1991b) or keeled (Captain et al.



Map 63. Range of *Eryx whitakeri* (gray).

2009). Examination of the holotype (Fig. 9.49) reveals a few cephalic scales showing a single nodosity apically but no keels; rostral is wide, lacking angular edge; subcaudals single; tail is short and blunt, scales lacking keels. The number of dorsal scales at midbody is 50–54; ventrals, 201–217; subcaudals, 18–25; ocular ring, 10–12; supralabials, 12–14; infralabials, 17–20; cloacal scale tripartite, reduced. Dorsal color is variable during ontogeny and across individuals. Adults are mid-brown bearing dark grayish-brown blotches, joined or extending from nape up to about midbody, forming a band with irregular edges; flanks with narrow stripes of the same color; belly is pale gray. Juveniles are paler, with greater contrast to the blotches. Albinism in the species has been reported by Parmar et al. (2023).

The largest individual known is an adult female, measuring 810 mm, while the largest male is 530 mm in snout-vent length. A larger sample would probably narrow this gap. Males show a claw-like cloacal spur. Hemipenial morphology remains unstudied.

Distribution

The range of this Indian endemic encompasses the west coast of peninsular India, from Goa, Karnataka, and



Figure 9.48. Adult *Eryx whitakeri*, lateral view of forebody. Kerala, India. Photograph by Indraneil Das.

Kerala (the type localities) to the Sahyadri Range of the Western Ghats of Maharashtra (Thakur 1988; Wallach et al. 2014; Palot 2015).

Habitat

Eryx whitakeri inhabits both coastal plains, including beaches and evergreen forests, to the adjacent hill ranges of the Sahyadris, occupying an elevational range of 0–950 m asl (Whitaker and Captain 2004; Srinivasulu et al. 2021b), apparently in areas of high rainfall (Captain et al. 2009). *E. whitakeri* has also been recorded from gardens (Lobo and Sreepada 2015a). It has been described as both semifossorial as well as an excellent climber (Whitaker and Captain 2004), with one sighted scaling a wall (Lewis et al. 2010).

Activity, Foraging, and Diet

In terms of activity, the species can be described as crepuscular and nocturnal but also known to forage by day (Lobo and Sreepada 2015b). Its diet in captivity includes mice and gerbils (Das 1991b); while in the wild, the common vine snake *Ahaetulla nasuta* has been recorded (Lobo and Sreepada 2015a). Prey is subdued via constriction and typically swallowed headfirst.

Predators and Defensive Behavior

When threatened, the species hides its head under the coils of its body or attempts to flatten the body into the substrate; it may also strike out to bite (Das 1991b).

Reproduction

Lobo and Sreepada (2015b) reported breeding between May and June, clutch size range 4–17, neonates measuring 100–110 mm and weighing ca. 18 g.

Conservation

The threat to the species is being overharvested for the pet trade and for traditional medicine. It is protected under Schedule IV of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 and classified as Near Threatened in the IUCN Red List (Srinivasulu et al. 2021b). It is also listed under Appendix II of CITES.

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Figure 9.49. The forehead of the holotype (ZSI 24810) of *Eryx whitakeri* shows faint ornamentation on some cephalic scales. Photograph by Indraneil Das.

Eskandar Rastegar-Pouyani, Nasrullah Rastegar-Pouyani, Naeimeh Eskandarzadeh, Mahdi Rajabizadeh

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