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Record size and weight of the Western Ghats King Cobra *Ophiophagus kaalinga*

The recently described Western Ghats King Cobra *Ophiophagus kaalinga* Shankar, Das & Ganesh, 2024 is endemic to the Western Ghats of southwestern India (Shankar et al. 2021; Das et al. 2024). Till this taxonomic revision, the world's largest record size for the King Cobra was 5.6 m (18.4 ft) total length, based on an adult measured in Thailand (Aagaard 1924).

This now applies to *Ophiophagus hannah* (Cantor, 1836). Thus, we do not have any ready reckoner for information of *O. kaalinga*, with regards to its record size.

The largest reported in the original description is one measuring 3,202 mm total length (snout-vent 2,660 mm; tail 542 mm), equating to 3.18 m (10.5 ft) (Das et al. 2024).



Record sized live adult male *Ophiophagus kaalinga* rescued by the first author near Agumbe,



However, understandably, the values reported by Das et al. (2024) only allude to the minimal sample size of the specimens examined to define the newly described species *O. kaalinga*. But this population, under an obsolete name, has been well-known for so long and hence, there were certainly well-acclaimed length records of *O. kaalinga*. Shankar et al. (2013a) reported adult males ($n = 79$ snakes) from Agumbe to be 3.5 m (or 11.5 ft) long and 4.5 kg weight on an average. Wall (1924) reported the maximum sizes of *O. kaalinga* based on specimens measured and reported by Millard from Travancore (now southern Kerala, India), as reaching 4.4–4.7 m (14.5–15.5 ft) long in total length. Here, we report on a toptotypical adult male *O. kaalinga* that topped the record values in length and weight.

On 31 March 2024, at 0915 h, we (GS, PP) rescued an *O. kaalinga* from a drain pipe near an areca farm from Nadpal Village (13.489° N, 75.067° E; 155 m) at the foothills, 5 airline km west of its type locality Agumbe. The snake was an adult male that was approximately 4.7 m (15.5 ft) in total length and weighed 12.5 kg.

Based on the past experiences of working with this genus for over two decades by the first author, the rescued snake was visually estimated to be 4.7 m in total length as physical restraint and measuring it with a tape to finer values would be both an intrusive and risky proposition. Using ImageJ software (Schneider

et al. 2012) on the photo furnished here, the snake's length was deduced to be 4.24 m (14 ft), a misestimate due difference in the planes of the snake and the handler whose height was used as a yardstick for estimation.

The snake was weighed using Pesola 80020 weighing scale, after bagging it inside a standard catch bag and then the empty bag's weight subtracted from the reading. In all the 20 years of rescuing and relocating *O. kaalinga* in the Western Ghats, this was the largest we ever recorded. Previous reports from the authors' team data rarely exceeded 3.93 m (13 ft) (Shankar et al. 2013a,b). Tweedie (1954) reported on a *Ophiophagus bungarus* (Schlegel) from Singapore that was 4.77 m (15.6 ft) long and 12 kg in weight. We construe Tweedie's report as a ratification to our visual estimate equating these as the closest published values for our present case, as both these species are similar in body build (Das et al. 2024). Thus, the present observation is a noteworthy report of an extraordinarily large specimen of *O. kaalinga* surpassing 4.24 m (14 ft), reported after a century, since the days of Wall (1924). Also, this report from its type locality Agumbe is far (>700 km north) from Travancore or the southern Western Ghats (Wall 1924).

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