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## New distribution records of *Ahaetulla laudankia* from Pune, Raigad, and Thane districts of Maharashtra



Full body view of *Ahaetulla laudankia* in life. © Amit Sayyed.

The Asian vine snakes of the genus *Ahaetulla* Link, 1807 are diurnal, arboreal, rear-fanged (opisthoglyphous) colubrids widely distributed across tropical Asia. The genus currently comprises approximately 21 species, with India harboring 13 species, of which nine are endemic (Deepak et al. 2019; Mallik et al. 2020).

*Ahaetulla laudankia* (Deepak et al. 2019) is a recently described species from peninsular India, distinguished by a combination of morphological characters including dorsal scale rows (15:15:13), ventral scales (192–202), and divided subcaudals (154–185). Since its description from Odisha and Rajasthan, its known distribution has expanded to



Head of *Ahaetulla laudankia* (lateral view). © Amit Sayyed.

Gujarat (Patel et al. 2019), Nepal (Rawat et al. 2020), and northeastern India (Purkayastha et al. 2021). However, recent taxonomic reassessments suggest that northeastern and Nepal populations may represent *Ahaetulla longirostris* rather than *A. laudankia* (Mirza et al. 2024).

In Maharashtra, the species has been sparsely documented, with records from Palghar and nearby regions (Narayanan & Mohapatra 2021; Patel et al. 2023). Despite these records, *A. laudankia* remains poorly understood in terms of its distribution and ecology in the state. Recent taxonomic revisions within the genus have further highlighted the need for accurate, locality-based records (Mallik et al. 2020), particularly in regions where earlier

identifications may require re-evaluation (Walmiki et al. 2012).

In this study, we report new distributional records of *A. laudankia* from Pune, Raigad, and Thane districts of Maharashtra based on 10 individuals. Morphometric and meristic data from four specimens were used to confirm species identity, while additional records were obtained from verified rescue observations. These findings contribute to improving the current understanding of the species' distribution in the northern Western Ghats. Data for this study were collected from 10 individuals of *A. laudankia*, including four individuals recorded through personal observations and six individuals obtained from rescue records and citizen scientist



contributions, from diverse locations across the Pune, Raigad, and Thane districts of Maharashtra between 2014 and 2026. In all cases, photographic documentation was provided by local rescuers and citizen scientists to verify the sightings. Species identification was confirmed using the diagnostic keys provided by Deepak et al. (2019) and Mallik et al. (2020). For four of the 10 individuals, detailed morphometric and meristic data were recorded in nature during random fieldwork. Meristic characters, including ventral scales counted according to Dowling 1951, sub-caudal scales, and dorsal scale row reduction, were examined to ensure accurate differentiation from sympatric congeners.

Photographs capturing the diagnostic dermal appendage, ventral colouration, and mid-ventral lines serve as digital vouchers for this study. Precise geographic coordinates for four of the 10 were recorded using handheld GPS units, data for the remaining rescued individuals were extracted from images. The identification of all specimens was confirmed as *Ahaetulla*

*laudankia* based on the presence of a distinct dermal appendage, a brown dorsum with black spots, and the characteristic copper-orange ventral coloration with white mid-ventral lines.

All observations reported in this study were based on field sightings and rescue records. No animals were harmed, collected, or handled for experimental purposes. Data collection complied with applicable wildlife protection guidelines and ethical standards.

Detailed meristic data for four representative individuals are summarized below:

Specimen 1 from Raigad was observed by the first author on 13 January 2026 at Bhira. The total length was approximately 1,127 mm. Scale rows: 15:15:13; ventrals: 195; subcaudals: 154+ (tail tip was likely damaged).

Specimen 2 from Raigad was observed by the first author on 1 February 2026 at Poladpur. The total length was approximately 1,280 mm. Scale rows: 15:15:13; ventrals: 198; subcaudals: 181.

Present the data of the specimens observed and scale count where present (? =data not available, += damaged tail).

|    | Location                             | Latitude, longitude & elevation | Dorsal     | Ventrals | Sub-caudal |
|----|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------|----------|------------|
| 1  | Bhira, Raigad, Maharashtra           | 18.4554° N 73.3861° E; 96 m     | 15: 15: 13 | 195      | 154+       |
| 2  | Poladpur, Raigad, Maharashtra        | 17.9838° N 73.4620° E; 46 m     | 15: 15: 13 | 198      | 181        |
| 3  | Yewalewadi, Katraj Pune, Maharashtra | 18.4003° N 73.8947° E; 956 m    | 15: 15: 13 | 192      | 170        |
| 4  | Kokanipada, Thane, Maharashtra       | 19.2323° N 72.9642° E; 55 m     | 15: 15: 13 | 193      | 167        |
| 5  | Pune, Maharashtra                    | 18.3535° N 73.8224° E; 800 m    | ?          | ?        | ?          |
| 6  | Pune, Maharashtra                    | 18.3427° N 73.8427° E; 759 m    | ?          | ?        | ?          |
| 7  | Badlapur, Thane, Maharashtra         | 19.1682° N 73.2261° E; 29 m     | ?          | ?        | ?          |
| 8  | Pune, Maharashtra                    | 18.4371° N 73.8348° E; 719 m    | ?          | ?        | ?          |
| 9  | Pune, Maharashtra                    | 18.3985° N 73.8551° E; 986 m    | ?          | ?        | ?          |
| 10 | Pune, Maharashtra                    | 18.3431° N 73.7581° E; 873 m    | ?          | ?        | ?          |





Specimen 3 from Pune was a juvenile observed by second author on 21 December 2014 at Yewalewadi, Katraj. Total length approximately 610 mm. Ventrals: 192; subcaudals: 170. This represents one of the earliest undocumented records of the species in the region, previously likely misidentified as *A. nasuta*.

Specimen 4 from Kokanipada, Thane was observed by Shashank Raul on 11 July 2023. Total length approximately 1,737 mm. Scale rows: 15:15:13; ventrals: 193; subcaudals: 167. This specimen represents a significant maximum size record for the species.

The present study expands the known distribution of *Ahaetulla laudankia* across the northern Western Ghats and adjoining coastal regions of Maharashtra. Earlier records in the state were limited to Palghar and nearby areas (Narayanan & Mohapatra 2021; Patel et al. 2023). The new records from Pune, Raigad, and Thane districts indicate a wider distribution than previously understood, filling an important geographic gap in the northern Western Ghats.

The occurrence of *A. laudankia* across habitats ranging from low-elevation coastal areas such as Badlapur (29 m) to higher-elevation localities such as Katraj, Pune (986 m) suggests considerable ecological tolerance. This indicates that the species is not restricted to a narrow habitat type and may inhabit both forested and semi-urban landscapes where adequate arboreal cover is available. Observations from peri-urban areas further highlight its potential adaptability to human-modified environments.

The use of rescue data and citizen science observations highlights the importance of non-traditional data sources in documenting cryptic species. Vine snakes, due to their cryptic and camouflaging slender morphology and arboreal habits, are often overlooked during conventional surveys. In addition, historical confusion with closely related taxa, particularly *A. nasuta*, has contributed to gaps in distributional knowledge. Recent taxonomic revisions (Mallik et al. 2020) necessitate re-evaluation of earlier records, and it is likely that some reports of *A. nasuta* from Maharashtra represent *A. laudankia*.

Meristic data from examined individuals fall within the diagnostic range of *A. laudankia* (Deepak et al. 2019), confirming species identity. The Thane specimen (~1,737 mm total length) represents a notable size record, suggesting the species may attain larger sizes than previously reported; however, further sampling is required to confirm this. Despite these findings, aspects of the species' ecology, including diet, reproduction, and population structure, remain poorly understood.

In conclusion, the present study emphasizes the need for systematic surveys and re-evaluation of historical records to accurately document the distribution of *Ahaetulla laudankia*.

The integration of field observations, rescue data, and citizen science can significantly improve our understanding of such cryptic arboreal species and support future conservation efforts.



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