

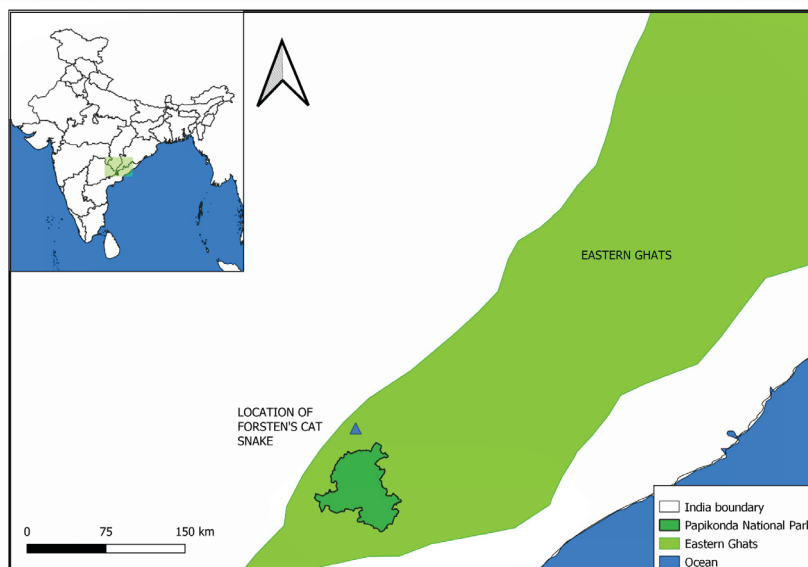


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Forsten's Cat Snake, a new record for Papikonda Hills, northern Eastern Ghats

The Forsten's Catsnake *Boiga forsteni* is a mildly venomous, rear-fanged colubrid, exhibiting a broad yet patchy distribution across Nepal, Sri Lanka, and India (Whitaker & Captain 2004; Hussain & Das 2017). In India, its presence has been documented in hilly/forested tracts across the country, including the Shivalik ranges in the north, the Western Ghats, parts of the Eastern Ghats and the hills of central India and Gangetic plains (Gharat et al. 2021; Visvanathan et al. 2022). It is known to be an uncommon snake, not found in close proximity to human habitation (Mohapatra et al. 2009). In this note, we report a case of roadkill of this uncommon snake species, from within a protected area.

On 25 May 2024, at 0924 h, during a field survey inside Papikonda National Park in the northern Eastern Ghats located



The location of Forsten's Cat Snake roadkill observed in Papikonda National Park.



The road-killed Forsten's Cat Snake at Papikonda National Park. ©Yogesh Pasul.



in Alluri Seetharama Raju District, Andhra Pradesh, we recorded a road-killed Forsten's Cat Snake (17.760° N, 81.483° E, 88 m). This is the first record of the Forsten's Cat Snake from The Papikonda National Park (Dhama 2023) emphasizing the urgent need for further detailed biodiversity surveys to update species lists and understand ecological processes shaping animal populations in the Eastern Ghats.

In the Eastern Ghats of Andhra Pradesh, *Boiga forsteni* has been reported to be a rather uncommon snake and the only previous record of *B. forsteni* in published literature was in the Nallamala ranges of the central Eastern Ghats in Kurnool District approximately 530 km far from the present record (Rao et al. 2005; Srinivasulu et al. 2006; Ganesh & Guptha 2021). We identified the species based on the distinct body structure, positioning of the eyes and colouration. The head was triangular in shape and distinct from neck. The specimen had large eyes with vertical pupil and a broad black stripe that run behind the eye to the angle of mouth. The dorsal colouration is greyish with alternating irregular transverse markings giving it a checkered pattern.

Papikonda Hills and adjacent regions are known to harbour rich biodiversity, including several rare, endemic, and threatened reptile species, such as the Golden Gecko *Calodactylodes aureus*, Jeypore Ground Gecko *Cyrtodactylus jeyporensis*, Spotted Limbless Skink *Sepsophis punctatus*, Vossmer's Writhing Skink *Riopa vosmaerii*, and the Caecilian *Gegeneophis orientalis* (Aditya et al. 2021) and new species

are continuously discovered which underscores the need to do systematic survey of the lesser known taxa in this part of the Eastern Ghats.

Papikonda National Park (PNP) spread over 1,012 km², is located in the northern section of the Eastern Ghats. It was declared a wildlife sanctuary in 1978 and a national park in 2018 and is therefore one of the oldest protected areas in Andhra Pradesh. Unlike the Western Ghats and the Himalayas, however, the Eastern Ghats has very low protected area coverage, leading to significant anthropogenic pressure, particularly from hunting for wild meat, extensive land cover change from infrastructure development, and agriculture (Aditya et al. 2021).

In addition, the extensive road network within PNP poses a significant threat to reptiles particularly snake populations, increasing mortality during dispersal, as highlighted by the discovery of a road-killed *Boiga forsteni* which is nocturnal and essentially arboreal but would freeze rather than flee when encountered by a vehicle and subsequently run over (Mohapatra et al. 2009). Addressing such issue through targeted conservation strategies and increasing public awareness of threatened reptiles is crucial for mitigating the impact of roads on snakes. Implementing effective mitigation measures can help preserve the biodiversity of this ecologically rich but under-protected landscape, ensuring the survival of its diverse snake species.

Thus, our finding of the Forsten's Cat Snake roadkill inside the PNP, the most important



protected area in the largely neglected Eastern Ghats, reveals significant gaps in the current knowledge of biodiversity and conservation concerns that continue to affect small, lesser-known wildlife, even inside protected areas. Given the high anthropogenic pressures and significant threats to wildlife in the northern Eastern Ghats, urgent and comprehensive field surveys are essential to enhance conservation efforts and ensure the survival of diverse species in this under-protected landscape.

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