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COMMENTS ON "HERPETOFAUNA OF NALLAMALAI HILLS WITH ELEVEN NEW RECORDS FROM THE REGION INCLUDING TEN NEW RECORDS FOR ANDHRA PRADESH" BY RAO *ET AL.* (2005)

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Recently, a catalogue of herpetofauna of the Nallamala Hills including 18 species of amphibians and 48 species of reptiles was published in *Zoos' Print Journal* by Rao *et al.* (2005). As many as 11 and 10 species were reported as new records from the region and the state of Andhra Pradesh, respectively. Majority of the taxa reported are based on the voucher specimens collected from 16 sites in Nagarjunasagar Srisailam Tiger Reserve, Gundla Brahmeshwaram Wildlife Sanctuary and Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary over a period of three years that are deposited in the Eco-Resources Labs, Sunnipenta, Kurnool district. The catalogue is first of its kind for the region and a useful document, but has major flaws. While such checklists/ catalogues provide useful information, wrong reporting would harm not only the usefulness of the paper and credibility of the authors, but also cast uncertainty regarding the region's biodiversity. It is to resolve all these issues and in the interest of the region's biodiversity, this review of the earlier paper is intended.

The inclusion of Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary (located in the grassland plains between the Nallamala and Erramala Hills (see Dadbadghoa & Shankarnarayan, 1973; Srinivasulu & Srinivasulu, 2004) is erroneous as it is one of the geo-administrative regions under the Project Tiger Circle of the Andhra Pradesh State Forest Department, and it has nothing to do with the geographically distinct Nallamala Hills.

1. The legend of the map of the study area (on page 1740) detailing the collection sites includes wrong depiction of the coordinates of each location. The coordinates provided are values of decimal latitude and longitude represented in minutes and degree format.

2. Of the new records claims, six records for Andhra Pradesh and five records for the region have already been cited earlier by other workers. Having included the Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary as a part of the Nallamala Hills, the claim of new records of *Calotes rouxii* (Duméril & Bibron, 1837) (Squamata: Agamidae) and *Lycodon striatus* (Shaw, 1802) (Squamata: Colubridae) are not correct as both these taxa have been recorded from Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary and its vicinity by Srinivasulu and Srinivasulu (2004). *Bufo scaber* (Schneider, 1799) (Amphibia: Bufonidae) and *Geochelone elegans* (Schoepff, 1795) (Testudines: Testudinidae) was reported from

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the Nallamala Hills by Subba Rao *et al.* (1994). Rao *et al.* (2005) also included *Cerebrus rynchops* (Squamata: Colubridae) based on sighting. This taxon is a saltwater and estuarine species and its presence on the Nallamala Hills is unquestionably a case of wrong identification.

3. Of the six new records for Andhra Pradesh, three each pertains to amphibian and reptilian species. *Kaloula taprobanica* Parker, 1934 (Amphibia: Microhylidae) was recorded from Andhra Pradesh by Sivakumar *et al.* (2003) based on specimens collected on Sriharikota Island, Nellore district. *Sphaeroteca rolandae* (Dubois, 1983) (Amphibia: Ranidae) (listed as *Tomopterna rolandae* by Rao *et al.*, 2005) is based on wrong identification of the specimen, which is that of *Sphaeroteca breviceps* (Schneider, 1799) (Image 14[w] on page iii of the web supplement). The claim of occurrence of *Polypedates leucomystax* (Gravenhorst, 1829) is also erroneous as the species is restricted in distribution to the northeastern region from West Bengal and eastwards in India and the specimen collected from the Nallamala Hills is one of the adult male morphotype (Image 15[w] on page iii of the web supplement) of *Polypedates maculatus* (Gray & Hardwicke, 1834).

4. Despite providing the photograph (Image 42[w] on page ix of the web supplement) the authors have missed including *Ahaetulla nasuta* (Lacépède, 1789) – a very common rear-fanged snake in the Nallamala Hills. Instead they have included a subspecies *nomen* assigned for a specimen collected from Mallelateertham, which warrants detailed pholidosis studies to establish its identity. I have seen this specimen in the ERM lab and feel that it shows characters intermediate between *Ahaetulla nasuta* (Lacépède, 1789) and *Ahaetulla pulverulenta* (Duméril, Bibron & Duméril, 1854).

5. The record of *Mabuya beddomii* (Jerdon, 1870) is based on wrong identification of the voucher, which is that of the Andhra Pradesh endemic *Mabuya nagarjuni* Sharma, 1969 (Image 30[w] on page vii of the web supplement shows *Mabuya nagarjuni* Sharma, 1969).

6. Rao *et al.* (2005) include *Sibynophis subpunctatus* (with wrong common name of Cantor's Black-headed Snake instead of Dumeril's Black-headed Snake) in the catalogue and go to claim it as first record from Andhra Pradesh. Earlier, Rao and Sekar (1993) had reported the Cantor's Blackheaded Snake *Sibynophis saggitaria* (Cantor, 1839) from Sriharikota Island, Nellore district. With recent resurrection of the nomen *subpunctatus* from the synonymy of *Sibynophis saggitaria* (Cantor, 1839) by Captain *et al.* (2004), all records pertaining to that of the latter *nomen* would be assigned to the resurrected *nomen*, thus invalidating Rao *et al.*'s (2005) claim.

7. It is indeed very gladdening to witness increased interest and zeal by which both amateurs and professionals are documenting the biodiversity at the regional levels. This is very important for achieving long-term conservation goals in India. However, care needs to be taken in reporting new records after complete study of references and keys. Amateurs involved in biodiversity documentation and reporting 'new records' (which no doubt is very valuable in terms of increasing the conservation status of the region concerned) should enumerate a *nomina* as 'new record' with detailed description and comparisons of allied forms. This practice would ensure promotion of good science, especially in terms of documentation of biodiversity richness, in the country.

Of the new reports listed in the said catalogue, only six species (namely, *Uperodon systoma*; *Amphiesma stolata*; *Boiga forsteni*; *Lycodon travancoricus*, *Macropisthodon plumbicolor* and *Trimesurus gramineus*) are valid as first records for the region and four species (namely, *Uperodon globulosus*; *Rana temporalis*; *Lygosoma guentheri* and *Liopeltis calamaria*) are valid as first records for Andhra Pradesh.

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