

A TAXONOMIC RE-ASSESSMENT OF THE CENTIPEDE *SCOLOPENDRA GIGANTEA* LINNAEUS (CHILOPODA: SCOLOPENDRIDAE) AND CONFIRMATION OF ITS OCCURRENCE IN INDIA

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Yadav (1997) recorded the Giant Centipede *Scolopendra gigantea* Linnaeus based on the study of a single specimen about 20cm long, and black in colour, collected from Alibagh, in Raigad district of Maharashtra. Since the species, is known to occur in nearctic and neotropical regions only, especially in Columbia and coastal islands of Venezuela, Khanna (1998) did not agree to the report of transoceanic occurrence of *S. gigantea* Linnaeus, in India. Khanna (2001) did not include the species in his checklist of the Indian species of Scolopendrid centipedes assuming that Yadav (1997) had probably been misled by the size of the species from India.

Recently in the month of Dec 2004, the specimen of *S. gigantea*, displayed in the Museum of Western Regional Station, Zoological Survey of India, Pune, was re-examined by the senior author, and after being convinced, hereby rectify the error of excluding *S. gigantea* from the Indian checklist. With this, the total number of known species of scolopendrid centipedes is now raised to 102. The species is the largest centipede now known from India.

Brief Description

S. gigantea Linnaeus 1758. Syst. Nat. 10th Ed. 638.

Type Locality: Neotype: US Virgin Island; St. Thomas (Shelley & Kiser, 2000)

Material Examined: 1.xii.1973, Alibagh, Raigad District, Maharashtra, India, coll. G.M. Yazdani.

Attems (1930) records the body length up to 265mm but Shelley and Kiser (2000) documented a specimen of *Scolopendra gigantea* from Venezuela that is nearly 275mm (11in.) long. There are undocumented reports on the web of specimens of around 400mm (16in.) on Curacao.

Head dark olive brown to dark red-brown; cephalic plate with complete longitudinal sutures; prosternum with transverse groove; legs olive green with yellowish ends; II tarsus completely yellow. Cephalic plate densely punctate with two fine longitudinal furrows. Antennae 17 segmented with 7-9 basal segments glabrous. Dental plate more densely punctate than the base, with very small rounded groove in front, and also with a seta; 4+4 teeth on the dental plate, the inner two

being more or less coalesced. First tergal segment with a procurved transverse groove, 2nd tergite with very fine, small and 3-20 with complete paramedian longitudinal furrows. Tergal segment 4-18, with an additional median furrow. Emargination of tergites begins from 4th or 5th segment. Sternite densely punctate with two paramedian longitudinal furrows, deeper in the middle segments but weaker or almost absent in the anterior or posterior segments. End tergite longer than wide (4:3), strongly narrowing behind. First pair of legs with 2, 2-19 with one and 20th without or with tarsal spur. Process of coxopleural considerably long, at the end with 4-9 spines. Prefemur of the anal legs ventro-laterally with 2-3 rows of 2-4 thorns, medially and dorsomedially with 12-15 thorns. Prefemoral process of the anal leg with 6-8 spines.

Distribution: North Columbia, Venezuela, Trinidad, Isla Margarita, Curacao Aruba and India (Maharashtra).

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are thankful to the Director, Zoological Survey of India, Kolkata and the Officer(s)-in-Charge of the Regional Stations of ZSI, for their support and encouragement.



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