

# Survival method and habitat of Common Wolf snake

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## ABSTRACT

A new species of the genus *Lycodon* Fitzinger, 1826 is described from the Cardamom Mountains of southwest Cambodia. *Lycodon zoosvictoriae* distinctly differs from all other species of *Lycodon* in Southeast Asia by a combination of its morphometric characters and unique coloration. The new species has 17 dorsal scales at midbody; 2+2 temporals; 8 supralabials; 10 infralabials; loreal separated from internasal and orbit; 213 ventrals; 85 subcaudals; pale tan brown ground color, irregular dark brown blotches on anterior part, 31 transverse blotches on posterior part of body and 26 blotches on tail. Given its submontane type locality, the new species could prove to be endemic to the Cardamom Mountains of southwest Cambodia and probably Southeast Thailand.

## 1. Introduction

A new species of wolf snake is described from the tropical mixed dry deciduous forests of the Anaikatti Hills, Western Ghats, India. This species is distinct from its congeners of the Indian mainland by the following combination of characters: dorsal scales in 17:17:15 rows, scales smooth with single apical pit; anterior nasal shield larger than the posterior, loreal in contact with the internasal, but not with the eye; higher number of ventrals (210 - 224) which do not angulate laterally and hemipenis not forked at the tip and lacks spines. The colubrid wolf snakes of the genus *Lycodon* Fitzinger, 1826 are characterized by their strongly arched maxillary bone bending inwards anteriorly, having three to six enlarged and fang-like anterior maxillary teeth without venomous grooves, increasing in size posteriorly, separated by a diastema from the posterior seven to fifteen teeth, posteriorly increasing in size, the last two being enlarged. During a field survey in 2013 at Phnom Samkos Wildlife Sanctuary species were collected. Of these, a single wolf snake specimen could not be assigned to any of the nominal *Lycodon* species currently recognized. Due to significant differences in its morphology and coloration, we describe the specimen as a new species. Wolf snake, any of a number of nonvenomous members of the family Colubridae, named for large teeth in both jaws. Asian wolf snakes are placed in the genera *Cercaspis* (one species; Sri Lanka) and *Lycodon* (about 26 species; Southeast Asia), whereas African wolf snakes are placed in the genus *Lycophidion* (18 species).

## 2. Analysis and Remarks

*Lycodon aulicus*, commonly known as the Indian wolf snake, is a species of nonvenomous snake found in South Asia and Southeast Asia. Early naturalists have suggested its resemblance to the venomous common krait as an instance of Batesian mimicry. The coloration of this snake is variable.

## 3. *Lycodon aulicus* (Common Wolf Snake)

This snake is often confused with the common krait. The presence of a loreal shield can be used to distinguish it from kraits. The following is a description of various forms from Albert Günther's Reptiles of British India (1864) Snout broad, much depressed, long, spatulate, with the upper lip swollen,

and without canthus rostralis. Rostral shield very low, broad, slightly bent backwards on the upper surface of the snout; anterior frontals very small; posterior frontals longer than broad, much more so in adult specimens than in young ones; there is a lateral notch between the anterior and posterior frontals, in which the inner anterior angle of the loreal is received; the posterior frontals have an obtuse lateral angle corresponding to the suture between loreal and praeocular; occipitals elongate. Nostril small, directed upwards, between two nasals, the anterior of which is situated on the foremost part of the snout. Loreal single, large, nearly twice as long as broad. Praeocular single, in contact with the vertical and with the third labial; specimens in which it does not reach the vertical are very scarce. Two postoculars; supraciliary rather small. Nine upper labials, the third, fourth, and fifth of which enter the orbit. Temporals numerous, scale-like. Scales smooth, with a minute apical groove, in seventeen rows. Abdomen and tail with an angular ridge on each side. Ventrals 183- 209; anal bifid, in a few specimens entire; subcaudals 57-77. Each maxillary is armed with two fangs in front, placed in a transverse line, the outer being much larger than the inner; the lateral longitudinal series of teeth commences at some distance from the fangs; they are small, from four to twelve in number, the last being considerably larger than the others; pterygoido-palatine teeth small, of equal size; mandible with two or three fangs on each side and with a series of small teeth. The following description is from Boulenger's Fauna of British India, Reptilia and Batrachia volume (1890). Snout much depressed, with swollen lips, spatulate in the adult; eye rather small. Rostral much broader than long, just visible from above: internasals much shorter than the prefrontals; frontal usually shorter than its distance from the end of the snout or than the parietals; loreal elongate, not entering the eye; one praeocular, usually in contact with the frontal; two postoculars; temporals small, scale-like, 2+3 or 3+3; 9 upper labials, third, fourth, and fifth entering the eye; 4 or 5 lower labials in contact with the anterior chin-shields, which are longer than the posterior. Scales smooth, in 17 rows. Ventrals 183-209, obtusely angulate laterally; anal divided; subcaudals 57-77, in two rows. Coloration variable; uniform brown above, or with white transverse bands, or with white reticulation; upper lip uniform white, or with brown spots; lower parts uniform white.

Total length 71 cm (28 inches); tail 11 cm (4¼ inches).[3]

Habitat: India and Ceylon, Himalayas, Burma, Siam, Malay Peninsula, Java, Philippines, Timor. A common snake in India.

#### 4. Observation

##### Scalation

The rostral touches six shields. The frontal touches the parietals, supraoculars, prefrontals and preoculars. The supraoculars are small. The parietals are one and a half times the size of the frontal. The preoculars are entire, while the postoculars and temporals are divided into two shields. There are nine supralabials, with the 3rd, 4th, and 5th touching the eye. The ventrals are 170 to 224 in number. The anal shield is divided. The subcaudals are 56 to 80 and are divided.

**Distribution** : *Lycodon aulicus* is found in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, India (north to Himalayas and Assam; Maharashtra), Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar (= Burma), Thailand (incl. Phuket), W Malaysia, Indonesia (southward as far as Timor), Philippines, Seychelles, The Maldives (accidental introduction), Mascarenes, Mauritius (introduced), S China (from Fujian and

Guangdong westward to Yunnan, incl. Hong Kong). It is one of the most common snakes of India and Ceylon, but becomes scarcer on the coasts of the southeastern parts of India. It occurs on only a few of the islands in the Philippines.

**Behaviour** : The Indian wolf snake is nocturnal and is inactive in the day. It is of fierce habits and defends itself vigorously, however it is nonvenomous. It is known to defend itself when barred of escape, and can cause severe lacerations with its fine sharp "fangs". It may also feign death to lure in potential prey and to avoid being chased by predators.

**Diet**: *Lycodon aulicus* feeds on lizards and frogs. According to Günther (1864) it is one of the most formidable enemies of the skinks, which form almost its sole food, the "fangs" in the front of its jaws being adapted for piercing and making good its hold on the hard smooth scales with which those lizards are coated

**Reproduction** : Females may be larger than males. They breed prior to the monsoons and lay 4-11 eggs. The eggs hatch in September or October, and the hatchlings are 14–19 cm (5½-7¾ inches) long.

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- [4]. Abercromby, A F. The Snakes of Ceylon. pp. 52–53. ISBN 1-110-73774-2. Another striking example of protective imitation is the way in which the little *Lycodon Aulicus* (sic) imitates the deadly *Bungarus* ...[T]o make the deception complete, the *Lycodon* has enlarged front teeth in imitation of the fangs of the *Bungarus* ...
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