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Record of the sea-shore skink *Eutropis bibronii* in the Eastern Ghats of southern India

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The Coromandel Coast of India and northwestern dry zone of the adjacent island of Sri Lanka share several herpetofaunal taxa (Smith 1935, 1943, Das 2002,Whitaker & Captain 2004, Somaweera & Somaweera 2009) owing to their homogeneous contemporary landscapes and intermittent land-bridge connections in the past (Plant & Kumar 1997, Rohling et al. 1998). Both these regions, situated on either side of the Palk Strait, comprise of dry, sandy alluvial plains intermixed with scrub forests (Champion & Seth 1968, Fernando 1968).

The sea-shore skink *Eutropis bibronii* (Gray, 1838) is known from sandy, eastern coastal plains of India, i.e., from Puri, Orissa (19° N, 85° E) in the north, through Madras (12° N, 80° E), Ramnad, Rameshwaram, Kilakarai (9° N, 77° E), south to Rajakamangalum in Travancore (8° N, 77° E), and in northeastern Sri Lanka, from Jaffna, Mullaittivu (9° N, 80° E), Chundikulam (8° N, 81° E), and Pollonnaruwa (7° N, 81° E) (Smith 1935, Somaweera & Somaweera 2009).

In this note, we report on a live, uncollected, adult *Eutropis bibronii* observed on 31 December 2009, basking on a sandy river bank in Rasimanal (ca. 12°45' N, 77°40' E, 490 m above sea level, Krishnagiri district, Tamil Nadu state), situated 240 km inland in the Eastern Ghats, India.

Scalation: Lower eyelid with a transparent disc; mid-body scale rows – 30; prefrontals not in contact with one another; supranasals not touching one another; nuchals – 2 pairs, multicarinate, anterior nuchal subequal to posterior one; postmental – 1, large, subequal to mental; frontoparietal scarcely larger than interparietal; parietals subequal in size to both the nuchals together; vertebrals – 41; transverse dorsal scale rows at mid-torso – 9; supraoculars – 4, 2nd largest; supraciliaries – 5; loreals – 2, the posterior one slightly larger; supralabials – 7; infralabials – 7; postmental – 1; scales pentacarinate; snout markedly pointed in dorsal and lateral views; ear-opening as large as or a little larger than a lateral scale; auricular lobules – 3, large and conspicuous; temporals keeled; ventrals smooth throughout, as large as dorsals; 4th toe subdigitals – 19; subcaudals – 72+? (tail tip missing), smaller in postcloacal region, hexagonal and wider than long throughout,.

Colouration in life: Dorsum sand-brown with a black-edged, bright cream-yellow vertebral stripe, covering the upper halves of adjacent scales, extending in length from behind the frontal to the tail, conspicuous anteriorly to mid-torso, discontinuous and faint posteriorly; a thick black lateral stripe from snout to tail on either side, bordered below by a wide white stripe as a continuation of the white labials; an orange stripe below the white lateral stripe; hind limbs with creamy white spots above; subdigi-

Figure 1. Live uncollected *Eutropis bibronii* from Rasimanal, showing diagnostic characters.

tals and distal part of subcaudals reddish brown to ochre; venter unpatterned creamy white; ventral scales with greyish brown borders.

Measurements (in mm): Snout–vent length 52; tail length (incomplete) 75+?; axilla-groin distance 40; head length 11; head width 7; head depth 5; upper arm length 7; lower arm length 6; thigh length 8; lower leg length 7; eye diameter (horizontal) 2; eye to rostrum distance 4; eye to tympanum distance 3; eye to nostril distance 3; interorbital distance 5.

Comparisons: We here compare our specimen with the two, striped, syntopic congeners viz. *E. beddomii* (Jerdon, 1870) and *E. trivittata* (Hardwicke & Gray, 1827) based on non-type specimens, photographic vouchers and literature (Smith 1935) – lower eyelid with a transparent disc (vs. scaly in *E. beddomii* and *E. trivittata*); prefrontals well separated from each other (vs. in contact with each other in both); midbody scale rows – 30 (vs. 30–32 in *E. beddomii*, 34–36 in *E. trivittata*); 4th toe subdigital scales – 19 (vs. 12–15 in *E. beddomii*, 13–14 in *E. trivittata*); snout markedly pointed in dorsal and lateral views (vs. distinctly blunt and rounded in both); auricular lobules – 3, large and conspicuous (vs. 4–5, distinctly smaller and barely visible in both).

Of all the known localities in the distribution range of *Eutropis bibroni*, Pollonnaruwa (7°56' N, 81°00' E, 61 m above sea level) in Sri Lanka, situated ca. 35 km inland from the eastern coast, is the most precise farthest inland locality record. Smith (1935) vaguely stated "although this species has been found inland, its chief habitat appears to be the sea coast." and Daniel (2002) mentioned "… usually seen … among the vegetation of the sea-shore … occasionally reported from inland". The sporadic mentioning of its occurrence inland has apparently failed to convince contemporary workers that it really occurs there and led them to not include the inland in outlines of its distribution range (Das & De Silva 2005). Our field observation reconfirms the veracity of such sporadic records from inland (e.g., from the Cudappah Hills in the Eastern Ghats; Ganesh & Asokan 2010). Our recent sighting is at the same time from a considerably high altitude and in fact the highest ever recorded for this species. However, it should be borne in mind that our sighting is also from a sandy stretch of a riverine tract, which emphasizes the microhabitat needs of this stenotopic species.

Figure 2. Map of central and southern India showing the distribution of *Eutropis bibronii*. New inland locality indicated by square.

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Appendix
Comparative material examined

Eutropis bibronii – CSPT/L-29, MAD no number; *Eutropis trivittata* – MAD 1791923; *Eutropis beddomei* – ZSI SRS unreg. 1–7.