

A CHECKLIST OF SEA SNAKES (REPTILIA) OF INDIA

P. Padmanaban, C. Venkatraman, Muhamed Jafer Palot[†] and C. Radhakrishnan[†]

Marine Biology Regional Centre, Zoological Survey of India, Chennai- 600 028

[†] Western Ghat Regional Centre, Zoological Survey of India, Calicut- 673 006



***Pelamis platurus* (Linnaeus, 1766)**

Sea snakes are the most successful marine reptiles inhabiting the warm tropical waters of the world. However, they are not found in the Atlantic Ocean, Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. Among the sea snakes are species with the most potent venoms of all snakes. Some have gentle dispositions and bite only when provoked, while others are much more aggressive. Sea snakes are predators and play a key trophic role in near-shore marine ecosystems. Most species of sea snakes feed on fish; some prefer fish eggs, crustaceans and molluscs (Voris, 1972). They have evolved from their terrestrial ancestors. They are adapted to a fully aquatic life and are unable to move on land. Morphological adaptations include valved nostrils, paddle-like tail and many have laterally compressed bodies which help fast swimming and forward movements. But for the genus *Laticauda* which is oviparous, all other true sea snakes are viviparous.

There are 70 species belonging to 5 sub-families inhabiting the world oceans and estuaries. Of these, 22 species belonging to 3 families and 3 sub-families have been documented from Indian waters (Das, 2003); they are check-listed below.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

CLASS: REPTILIA
ORDER: SQUAMATA
SUBORDER: SERPENTES

Family: HYDROPHIIDAE
Sub Family: HYDROPHIINAE (True Sea Snakes)

Genus: *Astrotia* Fischer 1856

1. *Astrotia stokesii* (Gray, 1846)

Stokes Sea Snake/ Large Headed Sea Snake

Genus: *Enhydrina* Gray 1849

2. *Enhydrina schistosa* (Daudin, 1803)

Common Sea Snake/ Hook-nosed Sea Snake/ Beaked Sea Snake

Genus: *Hydrophis* Latreille 1802

3. *Hydrophis caeruleus* (Shaw, 1802)

Many-toothed Sea Snake/ Malacca Sea Snake/ Blue Sea Snake

4. *Hydrophis stricticollis* (Gunther, 1864)

Gunther's Sea Snake/ Bengal Sea Snake/ Collared or Narrow-necked Sea Snake

5. *Hydrophis cyanocinctus* Daudin, 1803

Chittul or Annulated Sea Snake/ Blue-banded Sea Snake

6. *Hydrophis fasciatus* (Schneider, 1799)

Banded Sea Snake/ Striped Sea Snake

7. *Hydrophis lapemoides* (Gray, 1849)

Persian Gulf Sea Snake

8. *Hydrophis mamillaris* (Daudin, 1803)

Bombay Gulf Sea Snake/ Bombay Broad-banded Sea Snake

9. *Hydrophis nigrocinctus* Daudin, 1803

Daudin's Sea Snake / Black-banded Sea Snake

10. *Hydrophis obscurus* (Daudin, 1803)

Estuarine Sea Snake

11. *Hydrophis oranatus* (Gray, 1842)

Gray's Sea Snake/ Cochin Banded Sea Snake/ Ornate Sea Snake

12. *Hydrophis spiralis* (Shaw, 1802)

Yellow Sea Snake

13. *Hydrophis gracilis* (Shaw, 1802)
Common Small-headed Sea Snake

14. *Hydrophis cantoris* Gunther, 1864
Cantor's Narrow-headed Sea Snake

Genus: *Kerilia* Gray 1849

15. *Kerilia jerdonii* (Gray, 1849)
Jerdon's Sea Snake

Genus: *Lapemis* Gray 1835

16. *Lapemis curtus* (Shaw, 1802)
Shaw's Sea Snake/ Short Sea Snake

Genus: *Pelamis* Daudin 1803

17. *Pelamis platurus* (Linnaeus, 1766)
Yellow-bellied Sea Snake/ Pelagic Sea Snake/ Black & Yellow Sea Snake

Genus: *Praescutata* Wall 1921

18. *Praescutata viperina* (Schmidt, 1852)
Viperine Sea Snake/ Olive Sea Snake

Sub Family: LATICAUDINAE (Amphibious Sea Snakes / Sea Kraits)

Genus: *Laticauda* Laurenti 1768

19. *Laticauda colubrina* (Schneider, 1799)
Yellow-lipped Sea Krait/ Colubrine Amphibious Sea Snake.

20. *Laticauda laticaudata* (Linnaeus, 1758)
Banded Sea Krait/ Common Sea Krait

Family: ACROCHORDIDAE (File Snakes)

Genus: *Acrochordus* Hornstedt 1787

21. *Acrochordus granulatus* (Schneider, 1799)
File Sea Snake/ Elephant trunk Snake/ Indian Wart Snake

Family: COLUBRIDAE

Sub Family: HOMALOPSINAE (Mud Snakes)

Genus: *Cerberus* Cuvier 1829

22. *Cerberus rynchops* (Schneider, 1799)
Dog-faced Water Snake/ Bockadam

SELECTED REFERENCES

- Ahmed, S. (1975). Sea-snakes of the Indian ocean in the collections of the Zoological Survey of India together with remarks on the geographical distribution of all Indian ocean species. *Journal of the Marine Biological Association of India* **17**(1): 73-81.
- Das, I. (2003). Growth of knowledge on the reptiles of India, with an introduction to systematics, taxonomy and nomenclature. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* **100** (2&3): 446-501.
- Kannan, P. and M. Rajagopalan. (2008). Distribution of Sea Snakes in the Indian Coastal Waters *J. Sci. Trans. Environ. Technov.* **1**(4): 218-223.
- Murthy, T. S. N. (2007). *Pictorial Handbook on Marine Reptiles of India*. 1-75. Published by the Director, Zoological Survey of India, Kolkata.
- Palot, M. J and C. Radhakrishnan (2009). First record of Yellow-bellied Sea Snake, *Pelamis platurus* (Linnaeus, 1766) (Reptilia: Hydrophiidae) from a riverine tract in north Kerala, India. *Journal of threatened Taxa.* **2** (9): 1175-76.
- Smith, M. (1926). *Monograph of the sea-snakes (Hydrophiidae)*. London, The British Museum (Natural History).
- Smith, M.A. (1943). *The fauna of British India including Ceylon and Burma, including the whole of the Indo-Chinese sub- region. Reptilia and Amphibia. Vol.3, Serpentes.* Taylor & Francis (Reprinted by Today & Tomorrow's Printer's Publishers, New Delhi).xii+568 pp.
- Sharma, R.C. (2003). *Handbook. Indian snakes.* 1-293. Published by the Director, Zoological Survey of India, Kolkata.
- Venkatraman, C. and P. Padmanaban. (2009). Cochin Banded Sea Snake, *Hydrophis ornatus* (Gray, 1842): a new record for Chennai Coast, East Coast of India (Reptilia: Serpentes: Hydrophiidae). *J. Sci. Trans. Environ. Technov.* 2009, **3**(1): 48-49.
- Voris, H. K. (1972). The role of sea snakes (Hydrophiidae) in the trophic structure of coastal ocean communities. *Journal of the Marine Biological Association of India* **14**(2): 429-432.
- Whitaker, R and A. Captain. (2004). *Snakes of India, The Field Guide.* Draco Books, Chennai. 385pp.