



An unusual body colouration of Ceylon roughside snake (*Aspidura ceylonensis*)

The small sized, non-venomous, and fossorial colubrid snake genus *Aspidura* Wagler, 1830 is endemic to Sri Lanka (Deraniyagala 1955). *Aspidura ceylonensis* (Günther, 1858) is rare and restricted to mid-elevation to montane and sub-montane forests at elevation of 500–1300 m a.s.l. in the Central Highlands and the Knuckles massif (Somaweera 2006). It is found in cool and well-shaded forest areas, with thick moist leaf litter, woody debris, and loose soil. The usual adult body coloration on dorsum is dark reddish or dark orange, rarely yellowish, with a continuous black vertebral line and two rows of dorsolateral black spots along the body (Deraniyagala 1955; Fig. 1A).

On 12 November 2012 and 26 July 2017 we found two specimens with unusual body colouration from Hanthana Mountain, near Kandy (7.2720N, 80.6442 E; alt. 783 m; Fig. 1B) and Keppetipola near Welimada (6.9084N, 80.8696E; alt. 1,158 m) respectively. Both specimens had the dorsum blackish brown with the middorsal vertebral line invisible and dorsolateral spots hard to see; the ventral side of the body a deep red; and neck with black markings on both sides. We took photographs and recorded morphological data (Table 1) prior to releasing them back to the wild.

Table 1. Morphometric and meristic data of the observed *Aspidura ceylonensis* specimens

Character	1 st observation (12 Nov 2012)	2 nd observation (26 Jul 2017)
SVL	300 mm	426 mm
Tail length	45 mm	68 mm
Head length	8.1 mm	10.2 mm
Dorsals	17-17-17	17-17-15
Ventrals	182	198
Subcaudals	33 (entire)	42 (entire)
Anal		entire
Pre/Postoculars	1 preocular, 2 postoculars	
Temporals		1+2
Supralabials	7 (3 rd and 4 th touch ocular)	



Figure 1. *Aspidura ceylonensis*: (A) typical orange colouration from Hapugasthenna near Maskeliya, Sri Lanka and (B) unusual blackish brown colouration (1st Observation on 12 November 2012) from Hanthana Mountain near Kandy, Sri Lanka

Literature cited

- Deraniyagala, P.E.P. (1955). *A Colored Atlas of Some Vertebrates from Ceylon. Volume 3: Serpentine Reptilia*. The Ceylon Government Press, Colombo: 121pp.
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