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Sri Lankan Colubrid Snakes

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Young Zoologists' Association of Sri Lanka (YZA) is a voluntary youth organization working for conserving nature and its diversified aspects. It is a leading institute dedicated to research, conservation, and education on nature's precious endowments. This non-profit oriented organization was founded in 1972 and is based in the National Zoological Gardens of Sri Lanka. The membership of YZA is an assemblage of professionals and scholars in various fields. The educational and research programs that form the stage of YZA have been much appreciated contributions towards conserving nature and environment. YZA is the only voluntary organization in the island conducting courses on all aspects of the environment and awarding certificates to students who successfully complete the course.

Sri Lanka Naturalist is a scientific journal that publish recent work in the interrelated fields of ecology, systematics, environmental management, and natural sciences. It attempts to publish papers of high scientific standard in a form that is comprehensible not only to specialists, but also to scientists in other fields, students, professional planners, and interested laymen. It welcomes original research papers, notes on observations, and scientific articles. If any naturalist, who possesses valuable information, is unable to publish them due to the language barrier, YZA is ready to provide translation facilities.

Refer last page for the guide lines for authors.

H. BANDULA JAYANETHTEI

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Editorial

In the evolutionary process that took place on the planet earth, the grand climax was achieved by the emergence of a new bipedal animal with an enlarged brain and higher mental development. The result, *Homo sapiens* is a phenomenon unique in the history of life on the earth. He has used his enlarged brain to think.....and to think and challenged the existing nature. He believes that "He is the top of the heap, the ruler of the world and the arbiter of the destiny", but the reality is explicitly displayed again by the recent "Tsunami" impact that seriously damaged the human lives and properties in South and South East Asian countries and made him to realize that "Nature is not a part of human settings but, humans are just a bit of nature !".

From the beginning of industrial revolution, the rate of the degradation and exploitation of natural environment is accelerated. Still most of us treat the Mother Nature as our garbage dumping site without any respect for her immense service. She infuses life to us, she produces food for us, she supplies fresh air to breathe and she does every thing she can do her children, but what happens to her children? Are they taking care of their mother? Most of us make our contribution to destroy the nature without any sympathy by removing forest cover, releasing hazardous gases into the atmosphere, killing and hunting animals, polluting water bodies with detrimental chemicals and garbage, adding non-degradable substances into the environment etc. Finally, after about fifty thousand years of the modern human evolution, the man shattered his own mother nature in a gigantic scale, as not ever done by a single species of organism in the past 4.5 billion years of evolution of life.

Now its time to think about this tragedy. Otherwise the human race will face more unimaginable environmental hazards in near future. Basing on the current environmental conditions, it is imperative that we have to face bigger and bigger problems than Tsunami, earthquakes, global warming, rising of sea level, or depletion of ozone layer. If we continue this in the same manner without making a sudden environmental friendly change in our lives, the sun will rise to a lifeless barren earth before we colonize the moon or Mars.

Now it's our turn to think and revolutionize. This may be the last chance. Therefore we have to decide with the choice of environmental friendly change on one hand or a big tragedy on the other !

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COVER

Sri Lanka, being a megahotspot of snakes, harbours a rich composition of serpents including 96 described species and subspecies, with 48 endemic taxa. Among them 44 (45.83%) distinct species and subspecies are colubrids including 19 endemic forms. Because this family includes approximately half of the known snake fauna of the country, myths about colubrid snakes are more numerous and more extreme than about any other snake in the country.

The cover depicts an adult Green vine snake *Ahaetulla nasutus* or "Ahaetulla" in Sinhala that widely distributed throughout the country. There is a belief among Sri Lankans that this snake plucks human eyes. Because of their arboreal life, the most vulnerable area of a person to get a bite is the upper body including the face. No such incident of "eye plucking" has ever been recorded.

The guest article in this issue of "Sri Lanka Naturalist" describes the fascinating world of Sri Lanka Colubrids and presents a good account on the myths and the reality of some colubrids of Sri Lanka.

Photographs : Ruchira Somaweera

Back Cover Photograph : H. B. Jayaneththi

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SHORT COMMUNICATION

A new record of endangered Jonklaas Loach *Lepidocephalichthys jonklaasi* Deraniyagala, 1956 (Cobitidae; Cypriniformes) from Pahiyangala, Kalu river basin.

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Pubudu Lakmal¹

Introduction

Loaches are small fishes that adapted for bottom dwelling life. The bodies are sub-cylindrical with flattened ventral aspect. They all belong to family Cobitidae of super family Cobitoidea (Loaches) under the Order Cypriniformes. They have a sub-orbital spine on their cheeks below the eyes. The body is covered with minute cycloid scales and they possess three or more pairs of short barbels (Nelson, 1976). They do not have air bladder as they always settle on the bottom. These fishes are very much similar to Gobies both from their morphology and habits. Two groups can easily be separated by, the presence of second dorsal fin and united pelvic fins of Gobies. There are two species of Cobitoid Loaches in Sri Lanka, which both belong to the genus *Lepidocephalichthys*. Among them *L. thermails* is a common fish distributed throughout the country. The second species *L. jonklaasi* is an endangered and protected endemic species, which restricted to the South Western ichthyological zone. (Pethyagoda, 1991)

Observation

The present observation was made in 24th May 2004 at Niggaha Dola near Pahiyangala rock cave, Bulathsinhala, Kalu river basin. *L. jonklaasi* was recorded from a small slow flowing tributary of Niggaha Dola flowing through a Rubber plantation, where the depth of water not exceed 15 cm. The location was shaded and with clear water. The bottom consisted of smooth sand, silt and fallen leaves. A single small (TL - 30 mm) individual of *L. jonkalaasi* was observed and positively identified after closer examination. Most of the time it was settled under the fallen leaves. It fed by filter feeding, by gulping sand particles very rapidly and expel them through the opercular opening. Associated fish species that were observed include, juveniles of Smooth-breasted Snakehead *Channa orientalis*, Walking Catfish *Clarias brachysoma* and Stripped Rasbora *Rasbora daniconius*.



(A)



(B)

Fig.1 A & B : Juvenile *Lepidocephalichthys jonklaasi* (TL - 30 mm) recorded at Pahiyangala, Kalu river basin (Photo : Banduala Jayaneththi).

Discussion

L. jonklaasi may grow up to 5 – 6 cm in length. It has a brownish yellow body with reddish brown blotches all over the body except the ventral areas. There is a dark stripe from eye to upper lip and another vertically elongated blotch on the end of caudal peduncle. But in juveniles, this elongated blotch may appear as a black spot. Fins are yellowish or hyaline with rows of dark spots. In the caudal fin there are several rows of “>” shaped black spots and 5-6 rows in the dorsal fin. *L. jonklaasi* is regarded as an endangered species (IUCN, 2000).

¹ Young Zoologists' Association of Sri Lanka, National Zoological Gardens, Dehiwala.

L. jonklaasi is recorded to live in a few localities in the low country wet zone. The type locality was Wilpita, Akuressa. This species is also recorded from Madakada (Kalu river basin), Kanneliya Reserve (Gin river basin) (Pethiyagoda, 1991) and from Dombagaskanda (Gunawardena pers. comm.).

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We thank Mr. Sujan Maduranga and Mr. Jagath Gunawardana for their kind assistance in the preparation of this article and the research committee of YZA for their funding to carry out an ichthyological survey in Pahiyangala area.

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