



Boiga ranawanei, a junior synonym of *Boiga beddomei*

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The cat snakes of the genus *Boiga* Fitzinger, 1826, are known from six nominal species-group taxa in Sri Lanka: *Coluber trigonatus* Schneider, in Bechstein, 1802; *Dipsadomorphus ceylonensis ceylonensis* Günther, 1858; *Dipsadomorphus beddomei* Wall, 1909; *Triglyphodon forsteni* Duméril, Bibron and Duméril, 1854; *Dipsias barnesi* Günther, 1869; and *Boiga ranawanei* Samarawickrama, Samarawickrama, Wijesena & Orlov, 2006 (Wall, 1921; Smith, 1943; Deraniyagala, 1953; Das, 1996).

The type locality of the last species was designated as "Bulawaththa, Gannoruwa Forest, Kandy District, Central Province, Sri Lanka". In excluding the possibility that their new species (*B. ranawanei*) could be identical with *B. beddomei*, Samarawickrama *et al.* (2006) noted: "A fifth species named *B. beddomei* (Wall, 1909) which has been collected from Peradeniya, Sri Lanka has been deposited in the Bombay Natural History National Museum of India (Wall, 1909; Das *et al.*, 1998). However the view was given (in particular by two leading herpetologists in Sri Lanka) that *Boiga beddomei* is a junior synonym for *B. ceylonensis* (De Silva P. H. D. H., 1980; De Silva A., 1990). Species status and distribution of *B. beddomei* in Sri Lanka are still disputable."

The original description of *B. beddomei* was brief, listing (from a series of seven specimens, five from 'Ceylon', one from 'Kandy' [Sri Lanka] and one from 'Matheran' [India]) only the following characters: 19 mid-body scale rows; 113–127 subcaudals; and 248–266 ventrals. In their description of the holotype of *B. ranawanei*, Samarawickrama *et al.* (2006) counted 19 mid-body scale rows, 129 subcaudals, and 257

ventrals. In our examination of this specimen, we confirmed the presence of 19 mid-body scale rows, but counted 130 subcaudals and 260 ventrals (including the pre-anal scale).

We are perplexed by the claim made by Samarawickrama *et al.* (2006) that the types of *B. beddomei* have "been deposited in the Bombay Natural History National [sic] Museum of India". Samarawickrama *et al.* (2006) attributed this information to Wall (1909) and Das *et al.* (1998), but neither of these authors makes any reference—explicit or implicit—to these types or their whereabouts. A search of the snake collection of the BNHS failed to uncover any trace of these specimens; what is more, there is also no trace of them ever having been registered in that institution. Similar searches of the reptile collections of ZSI and BMNH also proved abortive. We are satisfied therefore that Wall's types of *B. beddomei* are lost.

The statement of Samarawickrama *et al.* (2006), "However the view was given (in particular by two leading herpetologists in Sri Lanka) that *Boiga beddomei* is a junior synonym for *B. ceylonensis* (De Silva P. H. D. H., 1980; De Silva A., 1990)" is irrelevant in that neither of these latter authors claimed to have examined type material of either *B. ceylonensis* or *B. beddomei*. Their conception of *B. beddomei* could therefore have been founded only on Wall's original description, based on which the two species are separated entirely by their ventral-scale count (214–234 in *B. ceylonensis*, 248–266 in *B. beddomei*) and subcaudal-scale count (98–111 in *B. ceylonensis*, 113–126 in *B. beddomei*).

Of the seven syntypes of *B. beddomei* that Wall (1909) had before him, six were from Sri Lanka, and one from India. In the absence of preserved or fresh material from India, we cannot comment on the taxon he attributed to *B. beddomei* in India. Further, for his six specimens from Sri Lanka, he gave an exact locality for only one ('Kandy'), listing the other five merely as 'Ceylon'. For the Kandy syntype, he listed 19 mid-body scale rows, 127 subcaudals and 263 ventrals. These counts are consistent with those of the holotype of *B. ranawanei*. Additionally, the type locality of *B. ranawanei* ('Gannoruwa Forest') lies within the type locality of *B. beddomei* ('Kandy').

Boiga ranawanei Samarawickrama, Samarawickrama, Wijesena and Orlov, 2006, is therefore an unnecessary name for, and a junior synonym of *Dipsadomorphus beddomei* Wall, 1909.

In order to promote stability, and in view of its type series being lost, it is clearly desirable that the identity of *B. beddomei* be clarified through the designation of a suitable neotype from the type locality defined by Wall (1909). We therefore designate specimen NMSL 2005.17.1, holotype of *Boiga ranawanei* Samarawickrama, Samarawickrama, Wijesena and Orlov, 2006, as the neotype of *Dipsadomorphus beddomei* Wall, 1909. *Boiga ranawanei* is now a junior objective synonym of *B. beddomei* (Wall, 1909), which becomes the valid name for this snake.

Samarawickrama *et al.* (2006) diagnosed their *B. ranawanei* from a taxon they assigned to *B. beddomei*, of which they examined two specimens of unknown provenance (they did not provide a listing of the material they examined). They distinguished *B. ranawanei* from this '*B. beddomei*' on the basis of the former having 2 pre-oculars (*vs* 1 in *B. beddomei*) and 2 nasals (*vs* 1); supralabials 3–5 touching eye (*vs* 4–6); and 2 anterior and 3 posterior temporals (*vs* 3, 3). Even granting that these differences support the recognition of two distinct species, they provide no evidence to show that '*B. beddomei*' as conceived by Samarawickrama *et al.* (2006) is the same as that conceived by Wall (1909). Indeed, we think it likely that the Sri Lankan specimens Samarawickrama *et al.* (2006) identified as '*B. beddomei*' could represent a hitherto undescribed species, and we urge that it be described and formally named.

We note *en passant* that the year of availability of Samarawickrama *et al.* is 2006 and not 2005: although the period covered by vol. 12 no. 3 of *Russian Journal of Herpetology* is stated as "September–December 2005", the print edition of this issue was not available prior to January 2006. The year of publication *sensu* Article 8 of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (1999) is therefore 2006.

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