



## Short Communication

# An unusual morph in Green Vine Snake, *Ahaetulla nasuta* spp. (Lacépède, 1789) (Serpentes: Colubridae: Ahaetullinae) from Matheran, Maharashtra, India

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## Abstract

An unusual morph of Green vine snake (*Ahaetulla nasuta*) in Matheran, Maharashtra, was observed with individual has blended colour of *A. nasuta* (Figure 1) and *A. nasuta* var. *isabellinus* (Figure 2). Head and nuchal region of encountered specimen was pea-green whilst, rest of posterior body was olive-brown. Habitat of Matheran varies from foothills to hilltop, environmental effect can be the factor for this coloration.

**Keywords:** *Ahaetulla nasuta*, *Ahaetulla nasuta isabellina*, Green Vine Snake, Northern Western Ghats

The Green Vine Snake, *Ahaetulla nasuta* is an arboreal species, belongs to family Colubridae and subfamily Ahaetullinae (Figueroa *et al.*, 2016). This species can be diagnosed from its congeners in having long and slender body shape with smooth scales, pointed snout and horizontal pupil. *Ahaetulla nasuta* was recognized by Smith (1943) as a polytypic species and after resurrection of *A. nasuta anomala* (Annandale, 1906) as a distinct species, this taxon is currently recognized by four subspecies, viz. *A. nasuta tephrogaster* (Wall, 1908); *A. nasuta rhodogaster* (Wall, 1908); *A. nasuta isabellina* (Wall, 1910) and *A. nasuta rhodonota* (Wall, 1921) (Mohapatra *et al.*, 2017). Green Vine Snake is distributed throughout Peninsular India including some parts of Gujarat and Rajasthan, except extreme northwest and Gangetic basins (Whitaker & Captain 2008; Sharma 2005; Wallach *et al.* 2014), it is also found in southern Rajasthan i.e. Udaipur, Sirohi, Mount Abu, Kumbhalgad wildlife sanctuary and Pali district (Sharma *et al.*, 2005). Like other vine snakes, this species is diurnal and mostly found on small bushes and trees (Whitaker & Captain, 2008).

On 4<sup>th</sup> November, 2016 at 0327hrs during an opportunistic field survey at Matheran (19.00806°N, 73.29667°E & ~800msl) in Northern Western Ghats, an unusual morph (Figure 3) of Vine snake (*Ahaetulla nasuta* spp.) was observed. The snake was found in a semi-

evergreen forest patch while it was seen crossing a forest road. The snake was photographed and later identified following Smith (1943). Only the scalation of snake was recorded, morphometric measurements were not recorded because of heavy traffic on road. Scalation of the snake is as follows: 15:15:13 oblique rows of Dorsal scales, ventrals 189; anal divided and 8 supralabial scales were observed in individual. Based on diagnostic characters and by its photographic documentation, the snake was identified as *Ahaetulla nasuta* spp. The observed individual has blended colour of *A. nasuta* and *A. nasuta isabellina* as it has pea-green anterior body (head and nuchal region) with olive-brown posterior part. Although polymorphism has been recorded in many snake species (Kark *et al.* 1997; Sawant *et al.* 2010) including vine snakes (Mohapatra *et al.*, 2017) such unusual colour morph of green vine snake has not been recorded elsewhere by anyone; hence this observation is worth recording. Further study on taxonomy, polymorphism and ontogenic colour variation in vine snake will throw light on this unusual colour pattern.

Matheran is a small hill station near Mumbai, the capital of the Indian state of Maharashtra. Geographically, it is a mesa, with mostly a ferricritic surface on its top and basaltic parent rock exposed on the mesa sides, which form steeply sloping cliffs. The top of the mesa is covered

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**Figure 1.** Green vine snake (*Ahaetula nasuta*).



**Figure 2.** Green vine snake (*Ahaetula nasuta* var. *isabellinus*).



**Figure 3.** Individual of Green vine snake (*Ahaetulla nasutaspp.*) found at Matheran with blended colors of its respective two morphs.

by evergreen forest and the slopes are mostly barren cliffs (Modak et. al., 2018). As Matheran habitat varies from foothills to hill top, environmental effect can also be another factor for this coloration.

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