

## NEW SPECIES OF LIMBLESS LIZARD OF *SEPSOPHIS* SP. DISCOVERED FROM KHANDADHAR HILLS OF BONAI, SUNDARGARH, ORISSA



Recently during a field trip to Khandadhar Hills of Bonai Forest Division of Sundargarh district, Orissa, led by Professor S. K. Dutta and research team of Vasundhara namely Pratyush P. Mohapatra, Dr B. K. Mishra and Himansu Sekhar Patra, a new species of limbless skink was discovered. The reptile is classified under Family Scincidae of genus *Sepsophis*. With the finding

of the species, the genus *Sepsophis* is rediscovered after 137 years. During 1870 the then Col. Beddome discovered *Sepsophis punctatus* from Golconda, Andhra Pradesh and after that there was no record of the species any where in India. This limbless skink shows some typical characters, which differentiate it from *S. punctatus*. We found only one animal from the field and it is clear from the scale count and colouration that it is another species of the genus *Sepsophis* said Prof. S. K. Dutta of North Orissa University, Baripada, Orissa. The animal lives in loose soil, found near hill stream covered with thick canopy and is fossorial in habit (lives underground) (said by Prof. Dutta).

The reptile resembles a snake and can only be distinguished when looked closely. It is shiny brown in colour with black bands on the sides and dark dots on the dorsal part. It has rudimentary bud like fore limb (visible only under magnification) and no hind limb. It is a very fast burrower and immediately enters inside soil.

As we don't have any idea about the ecology and natural history of the animal, nothing can be said about its conservation. But it is sure that any disturbance in its habitat will have adverse effect on the survival of the animal, said by Pratyush P. Mohapatra of Vasundhara, who is also a Research student of Prof. Dutta.

There is another species of Limbless skink (*Barkudia insularis*) of the same family found in Chilka and Nadankanan Wildlife Sanctuary in Orissa. *Barkudia* distribution is confined to the coastal region, where as *Sepsophis* is found far away from the shoreline. There are two other families of limbless lizards found in India namely Anguidae and Diabamidae found in North East India and Andaman Nicobar Islands respectively said Prof. Dutta.

Professor Dutta and his team including research scholars of various institutions like North Orissa University, Baripada; Utkal University, Bhubaneswar and Regional Research Laboratory are engaged in biodiversity documentation of the state in collaboration with Vasundhara.