

New species of vine snakes

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In news

A team of researchers discover new species of vine snakes in peninsular India

Key findings

- The study was led by researchers from the Centre for Ecological Sciences (CES), Indian Institute of Science (IISc)
- The team carried out field visits across India to collect morphological data, tissue samples and specimens to understand the patterns of distribution and diversification of vine snakes

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The newly discovered species from the Western Ghats include

- The Northern Western Ghats vine snake (*Ahaetulla borealis*)
- Farnsworth's vine snake (*Ahaetulla farnsworthi*)
- Malabar vine snake (*Ahaetulla malabarica*) and
- Wall's vine snake (*Ahaetulla isabellina*) in the Western Ghats rainforests alone.

These species were superficially similar in their morphology but separated by geographic (or ecological) barriers.

Another morphologically distinct and much larger species, the long-nosed vine snake (*Ahaetulla oxyrhyncha*), was distributed in the lowlands and drier parts of peninsular India

Further, the team also described the Travancore vine snake (*Ahaetulla travancorica*), separated by morphology and a

geographic barrier from Gunther's vine snake (*Ahaetulla dispar*).

They also recognised morphological distinctions between the brown vine snake in the Western Ghats and the one found in Sri Lanka and gave the Western Ghats form a new name (*Ahaetulla sahyadrensis*)

As per the scientists, there are now six species of vine snakes endemic to the Western Ghats