

Rediscovery of *Geckoella jeyporensis* (Squamata: Gekkonidae), with notes on morphology, coloration and habitat

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ABSTRACT.– *Geckoella jeyporensis* (Beddome, 1877) was described based on a single male specimen from “Patinghe Hill”, and in the 135 years since the original description, there have been no further reports of the species. We recently collected two additional specimens of this poorly known species from close to the type locality. In this paper, we present a detailed morphological description of *G. jeyporensis*, as well as details of life coloration and notes on its habitat, based on the new specimens and published morphological data of the holotype.

KEYWORDS.– *Geckoella jeyporensis*, rediscovery, Eastern Ghats, India.

Introduction

The genus *Geckoella* Gray, 1867 is endemic to peninsular India (five species) and Sri Lanka (two species). The phylogenetic relationships of this genus remain unresolved; while Bauer (2002) considered *Geckoella* a subgenus of *Cyrtodactylus* based on morphology, the only molecular phylogenetic study which used these genera recovered them as sister taxa (Feng *et al.* 2007), albeit with extremely poor taxon sampling. More recent phylogenetic data support the monophyly of *Geckoella* (Agarwal & Karanth unpublished data), although it appears to be embedded within *Cyrtodactylus* (Wood, Heinicke, Bauer, Greenbaum & Jackman, submitted). Dorsal scalation divides the species into two broad groups – one with smooth granular dorsal scales, with or without small rounded tubercles (*collegalensis*, *nebulosa*, *yakhuna*), the other with plate-like dorsals or irregular small scales intermixed with larger tubercles (*albofasciata*, *deccanensis*, *jeyporensis*, *triedra*) (modified after Smith 1935).

These terrestrial geckos are widely distributed across peninsular India and Sri Lanka – with

Geckoella yakhuna and *G. triedra* known from the dry and wet zone of Sri Lanka, respectively (Somaweera & Somaweera 2009); *G. albofasciata* and *G. deccanensis* from the central and northern Western Ghats respectively (Giri & Bauer 2004); *G. collegalensis* from drier hills in southern Gujarat, the Western Ghats and southern India, with unconfirmed reports from Sri Lanka (Somaweera & Somaweera 2009; Mirza *et al.* 2010); *G. nebulosus* from across the Eastern Ghats, also extending west into the Satpuras (Agarwal 2007) and *G. jeyporensis* known from a single locality in the Eastern Ghats of Odisha (Smith 1935).

Geckoella jeyporensis was described in 1877, based on a single male specimen from “Patinghe Hill”, in the Jeypore Hills, India (Beddome 1877; now in Koraput district, Odisha State). Since then, no additional specimens of this species have been reported. A popular article that declared the rediscovery of this species (Dutta *et al.* 2005) was erroneous and referred to a specimen of *G. cf. nebulosa* (based on the photograph presented in Dutta *et al.* 2005; S. K. Dutta pers. comm.).

We conducted fieldwork specifically targeting *Geckoella jeyporensis* in high elevation areas of the Eastern Ghats in south Odisha and northern Andhra Pradesh in September 2010 and November 2011. We provide a detailed morphological description of the species based on the two specimens that were collected, details of life coloration, and notes on habitat.

Methods

The recently collected specimens of *Geckoella jeyporensis* were deposited in the collection of the Centre for Ecological Sciences (CES), Bangalore and the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), Mumbai. Data on the holotype (The Natural History Museum, London: BMNH 82.5.22.37) were taken from the literature (Beddome 1877; Boulenger 1885; Smith 1935). In case of discrepancies between authors, we present the range. The following measurements were taken with a Mitutoyo dial vernier caliper (to the nearest 0.1 mm): snout-vent length (SVL; from tip of snout to vent), trunk length (TRL; distance from axilla to groin measured from posterior edge of forelimb insertion to anterior edge of hindlimb insertion), body width (BW; maximum width of body), crus length (CL; from base of heel to knee); tail length (TL; from vent to tip of tail), tail width (TW; measured at widest point of tail), head length (HL; distance between retroarticular process of jaw and snout-tip), head width (HW; maximum width of head), head height (HH; maximum height of head, from occiput to underside of jaws), forearm length (FL; from base of palm to elbow); orbital diameter (OD; greatest diameter of orbit), nares to eye distance (NE; distance between anteriormost point of eye and nostril), snout to eye distance (SE; distance between anteriormost point of eye and tip of snout), eye to ear distance (EE; distance from anterior edge of ear opening to posterior corner of eye), internarial distance (IN; distance between nares) and interorbital distance (IO; shortest distance between left and right supraciliary scale rows). Scale counts and external observations of morphology were made using a Wild M5 dissecting microscope. In the description, details for the larger, adult specimen CES09/1356 are listed first, followed by characters for BNHS 2274, or,

in some cases, the range of values across both specimens is provided.

Geckoella jeyporensis

(Fig. 1)

Gymnodactylus jeyporensis Beddome, 1877; Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London: 685.

Holotype.— The Natural History Museum, London: BMNH 82.5.22.37, adult male, collected from “a wood on the top of Patinghe Hill, 4200 feet [1273 m] elevation”, Jeypore Hills, Koraput District, Odisha, India [collection date not listed in original description or BMNH register]. Collected by Col. R. H. Beddome.

Additional Specimens.— CES09/1356, adult male (Fig. 1A), collected from Galikonda, Visakhapatnam District, Andhra Pradesh, India (18° N, 82° E; 1234 m asl) on 9th October, 2011. Collected by A. D. Roy, P. Raj, P. Karanth, V. Deepak and I. Agarwal. BNHS 2274, subadult male (Fig. 1B), collected from Deomali, Koraput District, Odisha, India (18° N, 83° E; 1,240 m asl) on 20 September, 2010. Collected by A. D. Roy, T. Khichi and I. Agarwal. Precise latitude and longitude are not listed here in order to provide some protection from commercial collecting for this attractive species.

Description of CES09/1356 and BNHS 2274.— Adult male. SVL 60.2 mm (subadult male, 33.2 mm); TL 40.5 mm (8.5 mm, tail tip missing. Original length ~ 24.2 mm, tail tip stored for subsequent DNA sequence analysis in the collection of the Centre for Ecological Sciences, Bangalore CES10/1206). Head relatively short (HL/SVL ratio 0.29, 0.31), wide (HW/HL ratio 0.76, 0.74), not depressed (HH/HL ratio 0.45, 0.49), distinct from slender neck. Loreal region weakly inflated, canthus rostralis not prominent. Snout elongate (SE/HL ratio 0.42, 0.41), rounded; not much longer than eye diameter (OD/SE ratio 0.50, 0.52); scales on snout enlarged, roughly 5–6 sided, flattened, largely homogeneous, similar in size to those on crown and interorbital regions, scales on occipital region slightly larger and flattened, scales on temporal region similar in size and bead-like. Eye moderately large (OD/HL ratio 0.21, 0.22); pupil vertical with crenelated margins; supraciliaries short, those at posterior of orbit bearing small

conical spines. Ear opening vertically elliptical; eye to ear distance greater than diameter of eyes (EE/OD ratio 1.39, 1.45). Rostral much wider than deep. Two enlarged supranasals separated from one another by a small internasal (in broad contact with one another, no internasal). Rostral in contact with first supralabials, nostrils, supranasals and internasal (rostral in contact with first supralabials, nostrils, and supranasals). Nostrils oval, more-or-less laterally directed, each surrounded by supranasal, rostral, first supralabial and three enlarged postnasals. A single row of small scales separates orbit from supralabials. Mental triangular, wider than deep. A single pair of enlarged postmentals in broad contact behind mental, each postmental bordered anteromedially by mental, anterolaterally by first infralabial and anterior portion of second infralabial, posterolaterally by an enlarged lateral chinshield (or second postmental), and posteriorly by three granules, the medialmost of which also contacts the other postmental. Supralabials to midorbital position 8/8 (8/8), enlarged supralabials to angle of jaws 12/11 (11/10); infralabials 10/10 (10/9). Interorbital scale rows between centre of eyes 19 (21).

Body slender, elongate (TRL/SVL ratio 0.41, 0.45), ventrolateral folds indistinct. Dorsal pholidosis weakly heterogeneous, composed of enlarged, hexagonal, plate-like dorsal scales in 21–22 rows, weakly imbricate across most of dorsum, smaller and more granular toward the flanks (Fig. 1C). Ventral scales much smaller than dorsals, smooth and subimbricate, largest in precloacal region. Midbody scale rows across belly to lowest rows of enlarged dorsals 25–27. Gular region with homogeneous, smooth, juxtaposed granular scales. No precloacal or femoral pores. Three postcloacal spurs on each side, dorsolateralmost largest. Scales on palm and sole smooth, rounded to oval or hexagonal, slightly domed. Scalation on dorsal surfaces of limbs consisting of juxtaposed granular to conical domed scales, much smaller than dorsals. Fore and hindlimbs moderately long, slender (ForeaL/SVL ratio 0.17, 0.16; CrusL/SVL ratio 0.17, 0.16). Digits long for *Geckoella*, short in comparison with typical *Cyrtodactylus*, slender, inflected at interphalangeal joints, all bearing robust, slightly recurved claws. Basal subdigital lamellae ovoid to rectangular, broad,

without scansorial surfaces, lamellae distal to digital inflection smaller; 8-11-11-13-11 (10-12-12-12-12) subdigital lamellae one left manus and 7-11-14-15-16 (9-13-13-13-12) on left pes; very weakly developed interdigital webbing between digits (except IV and V). Relative length of digits: IV~III>V>II>I, IV>III>II>V>I (left manus); IV>V>III>II>I, V>IV~III>II>I (left pes). Original tail thick, cylindrical, circular in transverse section, distinctly constricted at base; scales on the tail similar to dorsals of body, slightly smaller, less regular, tail ending in a single pointed scale; shorter than SVL (unregenerated tail in CES09/1356: TL/SVL ratio 0.67). Tail beneath with imbricate, semicircular scales, much larger than body ventrals, no enlarged subcaudal plates.

Morphometric and meristic data: SVL 60.5, 33.4; TRL 24.8, 15.0; BW 13.6, 2.3; CL 10.0, 5.5; TL 40.5, 8.5*; TW 8.6, 3.2; HL 17.3, 10.2; HW 13.2, 7.5; HH 7.8, 5.0; FL 10.0, 5.2; OD 3.6, 2.2; NE 5.0, 2.8; SE 7.2, 4.2; EE 5.0, 3.2; IN 2.4, 1.5; IO 5.2, 3.3; Supralabials (L/R) 12(8)/11(8), 11(8)/10(8); Infralabials (L/R) 10/10, 10/9; Dorsal Scale Rows 21–22; Ventral Scale Rows 25–27; Lamellae (Manus L/R; Pes L/R) 8-11-11-13-11/8-12-12-13-11, 10-12-12-12-12/10-12-12-12-12; 7-11-14-15-16/6-11-12-+-15, 9-13-13-12-13/9-13-13-13-12/ [* = tail incomplete, + = digit missing].

Coloration in life.— Adult specimen with body dorsum orangey-brown with a series of large, almost black, chocolate brown dorsal blotches (Fig. 1A). Blotches oblong, arranged in four relatively symmetrical pairs between shoulder and sacrum, with a broad fused blotch across neck and a similar dark marking on the occiput. Flanks with an additional series of 4–5 dark blotches between fore and hind limb insertions. Tail dorsum with six dark blotches, distal three forming bands that alternate with the orangey-brown background colour. Small scattered dark markings between the larger dark blotches, similar such markings on proximal half of tail. Flank blotches continue along ventrolateral margin of anterior two thirds of tail. Limbs somewhat lighter in color than trunk with a series of brown bands (fore limbs) or blotches (hind limbs). Crown less orangey than body dorsum, bearing roughly symmetrical dark markings. Labial scales and sides of neck white with scattered

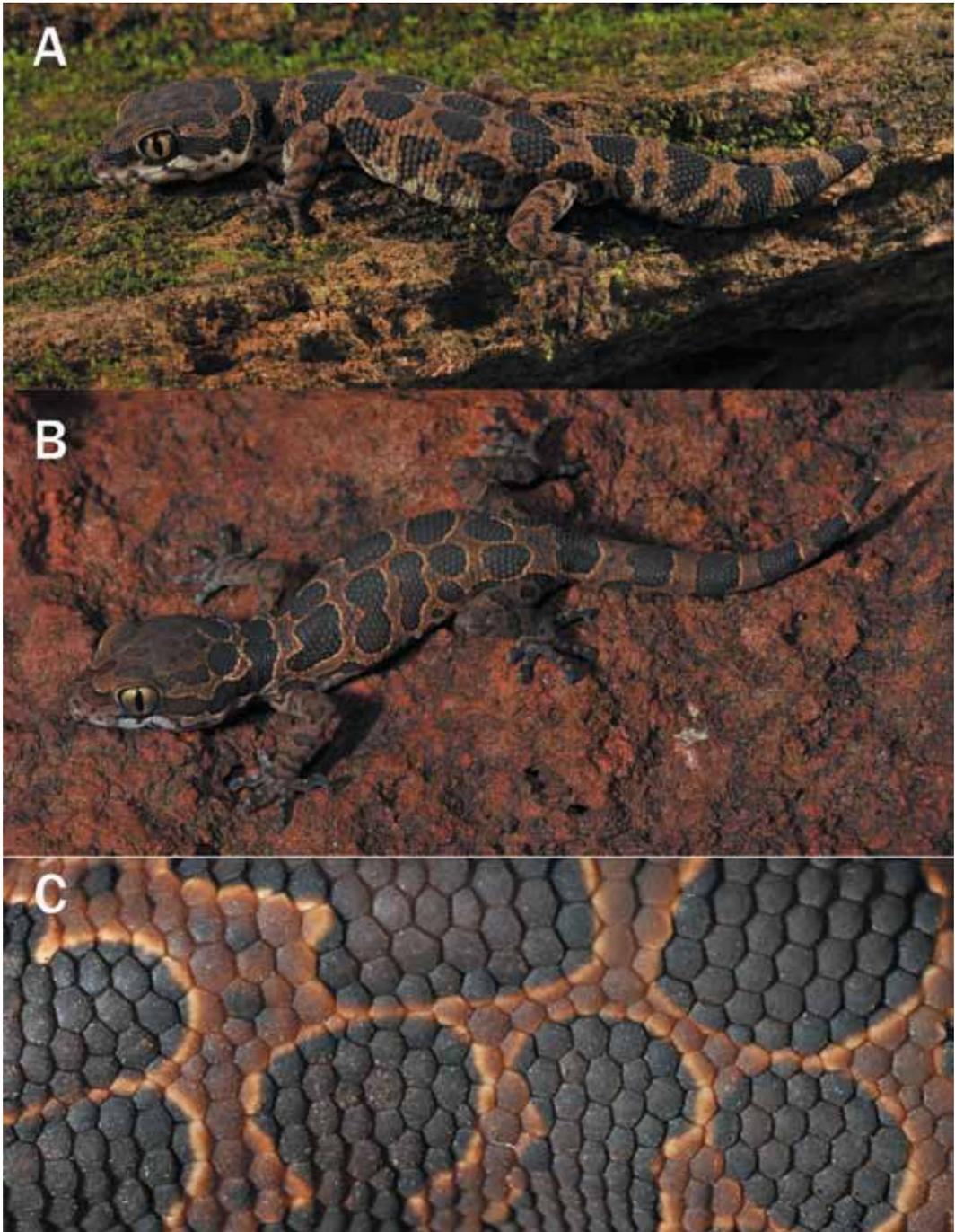


Figure 1. *Geckoella jeyporensis* in life. (A) Adult specimen CES09/1356. (B) Subadult specimen BNHS 2274. (C) Close up of dorsal scalation of BNHS 2274 showing the distinctive enlarged, flattened, hexagonal dorsal scales of this species.

dark markings. Venter white with dark markings under the chin and jaws, across neck, and along edges of flanks; remainder of venter immaculate. Tail venter pale dull yellow with five

narrow incomplete brown bands proximally and five darker, more complete bands distally. Iris brass colored.



Figure 2. Semi-evergreen forest habitat of *Geckoella jeyporensis*. (A) Coffee plantation at Galikonda, Visakhapatnam District, Andhra Pradesh, India. Photo courtesy of V. Deepak. (B) Deomali, Koraput District, Odisha, India.

Subadult reddish medium brown with a series of large dark chocolate brown dorsal blotches, each outlined by a very thin light goldenrod to orange border. Blotches arranged in pairs, although these are asymmetrical and may be fragmented: one pair on occiput, one fused pair on the nape, confluent with a broad ventral post-ocular streak, 4 (right)–5 (left) pairs from shoulders to sacrum, and 6 blotches on tail, alternating with narrower medium brown interspaces; tail blotches with goldenrod border only on posterior margins (Fig. 1B). Limbs with much smaller, less distinct blotches that form bands; goldenrod borders only on larger blotches of hindlimb. Antorbital markings a deep brick red with dark brown margins. Dark supraocular and crown markings, as well as a dorsal postocular streak, present; colour of head markings grading from brick to chocolate brown from anterior to posterior. Labial scales whitish with scattered fine black dots, light orange-brown blotches and incomplete black crossbars; markings more prominent on anterior labials and left side more strongly pigmented than right. Throat white with black reticulations, underside of tail, margins of limbs, and flanks dirty, pale ochre with darker blotches thickly bordered by black; belly uniform off-white to grey. Iris bronze.

Distribution.— *Geckoella jeyporensis* was described from “Patinghe Hill”, in the “Jeypore Hills”, at an altitude of 4,200 ft. (1273 m). While we could locate Jeypore, a town in Koraput District of Odisha, we were unable to trace “Patinghe” on any available maps. About 50 km from Jeypore and 10 km from Deomali is Pottangi, a small town, around which the hills rise up to above 1,200 m. Based on elevation and

location it is likely that the hill referred to as “Patinghe Hill” by Beddome (1877) is in the hill range around Pottangi. CES09/1356 was collected from Galikonda, near Arakku, Visakhapatnam District, Andhra Pradesh, India, which is within about 40 km of the type locality. BNHS 2274 was collected within about 10 km of the type locality, on the ascent to Deomali peak, near Jeypore, in Koraput District, Odisha. There are a few other high peaks (> 1,200 m asl) in this hill range where it is possible this species may occur.

Natural History.— CES09/1356 was collected from Galikonda which rises to about 1430 m asl, while the mountain on which BNHS 2274 was collected, Deomali, is the highest peak in Odisha, with a maximum elevation of 1672 m asl. CES09/1356 was collected from a coffee plantation that has mainly natural shade trees at an altitude of 1234 m asl (Fig. 2A) and BNHS 2274 was found in a patch of semi-evergreen forest habitat (Fig. 2B) at an altitude of 1240 m asl, while the holotype was collected in a “wood” at ~1273 m, suggesting that *G. jeyporensis* is a high elevation forest specialist. The high elevation forests at Galikonda are highly degraded and have been extensively converted to coffee plantations, only some of which have native shade trees. The plantations do not seem well maintained and there are small patches of native vegetation toward the fringes and near streams. At Deomali high elevation forests are restricted to pockets in depressions and sheltered areas, and have stunted trees, rich leaf litter and epiphytic growth. In both areas, the forests open into grasslands with *Pheonix* on the mountain-top (1300–1600 m asl). The aver-

age annual rainfall in Visakhapatnam District is about 1100 mm and 1255 mm in Koraput District (data from 1901–2002, http://indiawaterportal.org/met_data/).

CES09/1356 was spotted about 1.5 m above the ground on the trunk of a large tree at ~21h00 in the course of an hour-long search by five team members. The same area was searched for about 8–10 hours by three team members during the day and night in 2010, during which no specimens of *Geckoella jeyporensis* were observed, though a few specimens of *G. nebulosa* were located. BNHS 2274 was found during the day under a rock in a small patch of forest in the course of about three hours of searching by four team members, during which time two specimens of *Geckoella nebulosa* were also found. The same area was searched at night for about two hours by the same team and no specimens of *G. jeyporensis* were observed, although an additional specimen of *G. nebulosa* was spotted. *Sepsophis punctatus* and *Eutropis macularia* were also found at Galikonda and *Lygosoma punctata* at Deomali.

Comparison with published information on the holotype.— Though the original description of *Geckoella jeyporensis* (Beddome 1877) as well as two subsequent descriptions of the same specimen (Boulenger 1885; Smith 1935) are all brief, a fairly specific type locality is given, and a number of diagnostic characters are provided that allow us to confidently assign both CES09/1356 and BNHS 2274 to this species. Both specimens are from fairly close to the type locality and were collected from forest habitat above 1200 m (Beddome 1877). The distinctive dorsal pholidosis seen in the new specimens and described by Beddome (1877) is unlike that of any other Indian gecko, and is diagnostic of *G. jeyporensis*. Additional characters listed by Beddome (1877), Boulenger (1885), and Smith (1935) that CES09/1356 and BNHS 2274 share (holotype characters followed by variation seen in CES09/1356, BNHS 2274 in parentheses) include the lack of pores in males, subcaudals larger than belly scales, 18 dorsal scale rows (21–22, 21–22), 27–30 ventral scale rows (27–30, 25–27). CES09/1356 and BNHS 2274 differ from the holotype in the following characters (CES09/1356, BNHS 2274 vs. holotype): dorsal scale rows (21–22 vs. 18; possibly reflect-

ing a difference in rows included in the count), number of supralabials (12/11, 11/10 vs. 10), number of infralabials (10/10, 10/9 vs. 7). At 60.2 mm SVL the newly collected adult is about 11% larger than the holotype (54 mm SVL).

Discussion

The phylogenetic affinities of *Geckoella jeyporensis* are difficult to comment upon. There are two broad groups of *Geckoella* based on dorsal scalation, however, a close examination of CES09/1356 and BNHS 2274 reveals that the dorsal scalation of this species (Fig. 1C) is unlike any other *Geckoella* species and is, in fact, unique among Indian geckos. *Geckoella jeyporensis* is distributed in high elevation, semi-evergreen moist forests within the arid Eastern Ghats, which are a broken chain of mountains across the east coast of India with predominantly scrub or deciduous forests. Two other species of *Geckoella* are distributed in the Eastern Ghats. *G. collegalensis* is found in deciduous and scrub forests across mainly western and southern Peninsular India (Mirza *et al.* 2010), extending into the southern part of the Eastern Ghats in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. *G. nebulosa* is widely distributed across the Eastern Ghats from about 17.6° N to 22.3° N (Agarwal 2007) and occurs in a variety of habitats. *Geckoella jeyporensis* is sympatric with *G. nebulosa* at both Galikonda and Deomali, and is nested within the range of this species, and thus may represent a case of peripatric speciation (Coyne & Orr 2004). Additionally, the enlarged dorsal scales are relatively homogenous, and could conceivably be derived from or related to the homogenous granular scales of *G. nebulosa*. Alternatively, *G. jeyporensis* could be a wet zone relict, persisting in its moist high elevation habitat through the aridification of peninsular India (Karanth 2003), and may have affinities to the wet zone species. However such conclusions are highly speculative, and molecular phylogenetic data as well as more accurate distributional data are needed for a true understanding of the relationships among members of the genus *Geckoella*.

In some ways, the rediscovery of *Geckoella jeyporensis* is symptomatic of herpetological research in India. There are a number of species that have not been recorded since their original descriptions or are known from few

localities around the type locality (2011 IUCN Western Ghats reptile assessment, unpublished data), while the recent past has seen rediscoveries and new descriptions of many reptiles and amphibians (Gower *et al.* 2004; Mistry *et al.* 2007; Giri 2008; Mahony 2009; Seetharamaraju *et al.* 2009; Agarwal *et al.* 2010; Scheffers *et al.* 2011; Vogel & Rooijen 2011). While some of these species may be intrinsically rare, range-restricted or infrequently encountered due to ecological traits such as seasonality, fossoriality or arboreality (high canopy species); many so-called lost species have simply not been searched for by trained field biologists. This underscores the need for basic biodiversity inventory across India, especially in areas that have been relatively less studied such as the Eastern Ghats. This rediscovery was after a few hours of intensive fieldwork by a team with considerable field experience, though similar searches by other competent teams have not been successful (P. Mohapatra pers. comm.), and we also failed to locate *G. jeyporensis* at Galikonda in 2010.

The forest habitats in which *Geckoella jeyporensis* was found are under extreme anthropogenic pressures. Neither area in which the new material was collected is formally protected and both have been severely deforested. Galikonda and the surrounding hills have also been extensively converted to coffee plantations, while Deomali faces grazing and fuel wood collection pressures. More broadly, the hills in Koraput District face pressures from mining as well as social forestry activities (P. Mohapatra pers. comm.). Even if it is widely distributed in the region, the potential habitat available to *G. jeyporensis* may be restricted by its presumed habitat preference (semi-evergreen forests >1200 m asl). Many of these areas have been converted to plantations, agriculture or grazing lands, further reducing the potential habitat for this species. Deomali and Galikonda, the only localities from where *Geckoella jeyporensis* is definitely known, require immediate protection and surveys in the region are needed to determine where else *G. jeyporensis* occurs.

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