

***PHILAUTUS SANCTISILVATICUS* (ANURA: RHACOPHORIDAE),
A NEW FROG FROM THE SACRED GROVES OF
AMARKANTAK, CENTRAL INDIA**

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(with two text figures)

ABSTRACT.- A new species of *Philautus* is described from the Amarkantak, Madhya Pradesh, central India and compared with congeners from peninsular India and Sri Lanka. *Philautus sanctisilvaticus* sp. nov. is diagnosable from Indian and Sri Lankan species in possessing the following characteristics: head wider than long; tympanum small, concealed; webbing on toe IV up to basal subarticular tubercle on the inner side and to the distal subarticular tubercle on the outer side; dorsum brownish-grey, with a dark forehead, the sides of the body with brown and cream reticulations; SVL of holotype, a mature male, 20.8 mm; two paratopotypes, both adult females, 19.3 and 23.8 mm.

KEY WORDS.- Taxonomy, amphibians, *Philautus*, new species, sacred groves, Madhya Pradesh, central India.

INTRODUCTION

Hora (1949) used the instances of distributional disjunctions in Indian plants and animals to put forward the Satpura Hypothesis, which provide a working explanation to explain the co-occurrence of moist forest species in south-eastern Asia and the Western Ghats (although not on the intervening mostly xeric plains of northern and central India). Under this scenario, the once forested Siwaliks on the outer ranges of the Himalayas, acted as a causeway that allowed the emigration of Indo-Malayan biota into peninsular India. The Satpura Hypothesis has been generally criticized as being without geological support (but see Swan, 1993 for a recent argument in support), the distributional disjunctions shown by the biota thought to be relictual of an ancient, more wider distributional (see for instance, Das, 1996; Dilger, 1952; Erdelen, 1989; Jayaram, 1974; Kottelat, 1989).

An example of faunal disjunction is shown by the anuran genus *Philautus* Gistel, 1848 whose mesic condition tolerating members range from Sri Lanka and south-western peninsular India, and then, after a gap of over a thousand kilometres, reappear in north-eastern India, from where they range south (to the Malay Peninsula and

Archipelago) and east (to southern China and the Philippines; see Frost, 1985; Inger and Dutta, 1986. In a separate paper (Das and Chanda, in press), we describe a new species of this genus from the southern Eastern Ghats, which is assumed to represent another species showing relictual distribution. Dutta (1991) reported the genus from Orissa, based on a material (not allocated to species) in the collection of the United States National Museum, Washington, D.C., USA.

The present paper reports yet another new species of *Philautus* from the so-called dry zone of central India, from the headwaters of the rivers Narmada and Sone, in Jabalpur District, Madhya Pradesh State, and formally describe it on the basis of three adults. The discovery of the new species helps bridge the discontinuous distribution of the genus, and suggests the occurrence of members of the species, at least some of which we suspect are undescribed, from other relatively moist regions. The genus *Philautus* was hitherto known to contain 23 species, the Sri Lankan fauna seven species, with three species that reportedly co-occur in Sri Lanka and mainland India (Dutta, 1985; Dutta and Manamendra-Arachchi, 1996; Das and Chanda, in press). We