

An Unusually Dark Common Trinket Snake, *Coelognathus helena* (Daudin 1803) (Colubridae), from Nepal

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Various unusual color morphs occur in many reptiles (e.g., Bechtel 1978; Lorigoux et al. 2008; Strugariu and Zamfirescu 2009). Partial or complete dark coloration of the body might have adaptive benefits in snakes by facilitating thermoregulation, predator avoidance, or reproductive fitness (e.g., Luiselli 1992; Capula and Luiselli 1994; Bittner et al. 2002; Tanaka 2005; Lorigoux et al. 2008).

The Common Trinket Snake (*Coelognathus helena*) has been recorded from various districts in Nepal (Schleich and Kästle 2002; Shah and Tiwari 2004). It is active both by day and night and feeds mainly on rats, mice, and squirrels but also preys on frogs, lizards, and snakes (Schleich and Kästle 2002; Shah and Tiwari 2004; Whitaker and Captain 2004). Typical dorsal coloration (Fig. 1) is olive to dark brown with two black stripes on the neck and light bands on the forebody, two prominent dark brown or black stripes that continue onto the tail, and a pearly white venter (Shah and Tiwari 2004; Whitaker and Captain 2004). At 1041 h on 20 February 2020, we encountered an unusually dark juvenile (total length ca. 300 mm) Common Trinket Snake (Fig. 1)

during a rescue call in Buddhachowk, Pokhara, Kaski, Nepal (28°12'18.93"N, 83°59'58.45"E; elev. 866 m asl).

Aberrant colors and patterns have been documented in various species of Indian snakes (Mahabal and Thakur 2014). Wall (1913) described an “almost blackish” *C. helena* from Anamallays in southern India, on the basis of which Mahabal and Thakur (2014) included the species in their review. To the best of our knowledge, the observation reported herein represents the first documented record of an unusually dark Common Trinket Snake from Nepal.

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Fig. 1. Typical coloration of a Common Trinket Snake (*Coelognathus helena*) (left) and an unusually dark individual from Nepal (right). Photographs by Rohit Giri.

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