

**RICHARD HENRY BEDDOME AND SOUTH INDIA'S HERPETOFAUNA—  
A TRIBUTE ON HIS CENTENNIAL DEATH ANNIVERSARY**

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One name that stands out in the early decades of systematic herpetology of south India is Richard Henry Beddome (11<sup>th</sup> May 1830 – 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1911). Biographic sketches of his life and work are available in Godwin-Austen (1912), Smith (1931), Das (2003) and Vijayaraghavan (2005). For the immediate interest of the readers these are summarized here.

Beddome was the eldest son of Richard Boswell Brandon Beddome, solicitor, of Clapham Common, S.W. He was educated at Charterhouse School in Surrey, U.K. He first studied for the legal profession, but he could not get interested in it and preferred a life abroad. He entered the Army, obtaining a direct cadetship in 1848 in the East India Company's service, and was sent to India. He was posted to the 42<sup>nd</sup> Madras Native Infantry. He was with that Regiment at Jabalpur in 1856, serving as Quartermaster and Interpreter of the regiment and from there he went to Secunderabad. Soon after his arrival in Madras, at the end of 1856, he was appointed to the Madras Forest Department, and never rejoined his regiment. In 1857, due to his profound fascination for natural history, was selected as an assistant to Dr. Hugh Cleghorn, the first Conservator of Forests of the then – Madras Presidency. In 1859, he succeeded Dr. Cleghorn to become the Chief Conservator of Forests in which position he continued until 1882. Meanwhile, in 1880, due to his scholarly contributions to the natural history of southern India, he became a “member” of the University of Madras. Aside from botany, he is best known for his herpetological studies in southern India. His most outstanding contribution is the

series of collections and descriptions that he made in the Eastern and Western Ghats, which forms part of a global biodiversity hotspot rich in endemism (Myers *et al.*, 2000). His herpetological collections, most of which he described, were deposited in the Natural History Museum in London and the Indian Museum, Calcutta (now Zoological Survey of India, Kolkata, West Bengal, India). He retired from service in 1892 and died at Wandsworth, United Kingdom in 1911.

His name has been immortalized by his superb contributions to south India's herpetology which are of interest to the student of Indian herpetology even today after a lapse of a century. By summarizing and presenting his contributions to the herpetology of south India, this paper pays a tribute to his memory on the occasion of the centennial of his death anniversary.

During the period of 24 years from 1862 to 1886 Beddome had published 15 papers on the subject, most of which contained the description of at least one new species.

**(a) List of Beddome's herpetological publications:**

- 1) 1862. Notes upon the land and freshwater snakes of the Madras Presidency. *Madras Quart. J. Med. Sci.* v. pp. 1-32, pl-2.
- 2) 1863 a. Further notes upon the Snakes of the Madras Presidency; with descriptions of new species. *Madras Quart. J. Med. Sci.* vi. pp. 41-8, pls. i & ii.
- 3) 1863 b. Descriptions of new species of the family Uropeltidae from Southern India, with notes on other little-known species. *Proc. Zool. Soc. London*, pp. 225—9, 3 coloured pls.
- 4) 1864. Descriptions of new species of *Elaps* from Malabar. *Proc. Zool. Soc. London*, pp. 179-80.
- 5) 1866. Notes upon the Snakes of the Madras Presidency. Description and plate of a new species of Snake of the family Uropeltidae from the Pulney Mountains. *Madras Quart. J. Med. Sci.* ix. pp. 207-8, pl.
- 6) 1867. Descriptions and figures of five new Snakes from the Madras Presidency. *Madras Quart. J. Med. Sci.* xi. pp. 14-16, pls. i & ii.
- 7) 1870 a. Descriptions of some new Lizards from the Madras Presidency. *Madras Month. J. Med. Sci.* i. pp. 30-5, 2 pls.

- 8) 1870 b. Descriptions of new Reptiles from the Madras Presidency. *Madras Month. J. Med. Sci.* ii, pp. 169-76.
- 9) 1871. Descriptions of new Reptiles from the Madras Presidency. *Madras Month. J. Med. Sci.* iv. pp. 401-4, pls. i & ii.
- 10) 1876. Description of three new species of Indian Snake of the genus *Platyplectrurus* from the Wynad. *Proc. Zool. Soc. London*, p. 701.
- 11) 1877 a. Descriptions of new Reptiles from the Madras Presidency. *Proc. Zool. Soc. London*, pp. 685-6.
- 12) 1877 b. Descriptions of three new Snakes of the family Uropeltidae from Southern India. *Proc. Zool. Soc. London*, pp. 167-8.
- 13) 1878 a. Descriptions of new Genus of Tree-Lizards from the higher Ranges of the Anamallays. *Ibid.* p. 153, pl. xiv.
- 14) 1878 b. Descriptions of Uropeltidae from Southern India, with remarks on some previously described species. *Proc. Zool. Soc. London*, pp. 154-5.
- 15) 1886. An account of the Earth-snakes of the Peninsula of India and Ceylon. *Ann. Mag. Nat. Hist.* (5) xvii, pp. 3-33.

The above list reflects the sheer number of new taxa that it collectively contains. Several dozens of new herpetological taxa that are still valid today were collected and described by Beddome. Although his contribution to systematic research on amphibians is minor, his reptile descriptions are numerous. Chief among them are the uropeltid snakes and several geckoes and skinks from both the Eastern and Western Ghats mountain ranges. Particularly noteworthy are his contributions to our knowledge of the uropeltids since even during the one and a quarter centuries after his death, very little has been added to what we know of this elusive group of snakes endemic to south-west India and Sri Lanka, barring the work of M.V. Rajendran (1916-1993). Some of his important descriptions include enigmatic species such as *Sepsophis punctatus* and *Chalcides pentadactylus* (Reptilia: Scincidae). Some valid genera, endemic to the Western Ghats, like *Melanobatrachus* (Amphibia: Anura) and *Xylophis* (Reptilia: Serpentes) were those described by Beddome. The exhaustive list of his new herpetological taxon descriptions is as follows.

**(b) List of herpetological species described by Beddome** (\* indicates species currently valid with Beddome's own specific epithets)

AMPHIBIA De Blainville, 1816

GYMNOPHIONA Rafinesque-Schmaltz, 1814

1. *Cecilia malabarica* Beddome, 1870 (now *Uraeotyphlus malabaricus*)\*
2. *Epicrium carnosum* Beddome, 1870 (now *Gegeneophis carnosus*)\*

ANURA Duméril, 1806

BUFONIDAE Gray, 1825

3. *Bufo travancoricus* Beddome, 1877 (synonym of *Bufo beddomei* Günther, 1875)

MICROHYLIDAE Günther, 1858

4. *Melanobatrachus indicus* Beddome, 1878\*

REPTILIA Laurenti, 1768

SQUAMATA Opell, 1811

SAURIA Gauthier, 1984

GEKKONIDAE Gray, 1825

5. *Gymnodactylus nebulosus* Beddome, 1870 (now *Geckoella nebulosa*)\*
6. *Gymnodactylus collegalensis* Beddome, 1870 (now *Geckoella collegalensis*)\*
7. *Gymnodactylus speciosus* Beddome, 1870 (subspecies of the former species)
8. *Gymnodactylus deccanensis* (not of Günther, 1864) Beddome, 1870 (now known as *Geckoella albofasciata* (Boulenger, 1885))
9. *Gymnodactylus wynadensis* Beddome, 1870 (now *Cnemaspis wynadensis*)\*
10. *Gymnodactylus maculatus* (not of Steindachner, 1867) Beddome, 1870 (now known as *Cnemaspis sisparensis* (Theobald, 1876) [replacement name])

11. *Gymnodactylus ornatus* Beddome, 1870 (now *Cnemaspis ornata*)\*
12. *Gymnodactylus mormoratus* (not of Duméril & Bibron, 1836) Bedome, 1870 (now known as *Cnemaspis beddomei* (Theobald, 1876) [replacement name])
13. *Gymnodactylus gracilis* Beddome, 1870 (now *Cnemaspis gracilis*)\*
14. *Gymnodactylus planipes* Beddome, 1870 (putatively a synonym of *Cnemaspis littoralis*)
15. *Calodactylus aureus* Beddome, 1870 (now *Calodactylodes aureus*)\*
16. *Hemidactylus reticulatus* Beddome, 1870\*

AGAMIDAE Gray, 1827

17. *Lophosalea anamallayana* Beddome, 1878 (now *Salea anamallayana*)\*

SCINCIDAE Gray, 1825

18. *Mocoa travancorica* (in part) Beddome, 1870 (now *Kaestlea travancorica*)\*
19. *Mocoa travancorica* (in part) Beddome, 1870 (now *Kaestlea beddomii* (Boulenger, 1887))
20. *Ateuchosaurus travancoricus* (in part) Beddome, 1870 (now *Ristella travancorica*)\*
21. *Ateuchosaurus travancoricus* (in part) Beddome, 1870 (now *Ristella rurkii* Gray, 1839)
22. *Sphenocephalus pentadactylus* Beddome, 1870 (now *Chalcides pentadactylus*)\*
23. *Sepsophis punctatus* Beddome, 1870\*

LACERTIDAE Gray, 1825

24. *Cabrita jerdoni* Beddome, 1870\*
25. *Pseudophiops monticola* Beddome, 1870 (synonym of *Ophisops beddomei* (Jerdon 1870))\*

SERPENTES Linnaeus, 1758

UROPELTIDAE Müller, 1832

26. *Melanophidium punctatum* Beddome, 1871\*

27. *Melanophidium bilineatum* Beddome, 1870\*
28. *Plectrurus wynandensis* Beddome, 1863 (now *Melanophidium wynaudense*)\*
29. *Plectrurus trilineatus* Beddome, 1867 (now *Platyplectrurus trilieatus*)\*
30. *Platyplectrurus bilineatus* Beddome, 1886 (synonym of the former species)
31. *Platyplectrurus madurensis* Beddome, 1877\*
32. *Plectrurus sanguineus* Beddome, 1867 (now *Teretrurus sanguineus*)\*
33. *Platyplectrurus hewstoni* Beddome, 1876 (synonym of the former species)
34. *Teretrurus travancoricus* Beddome, 1886 (synonym of *T. sanguineus*)
35. *Plectrurus davidsoni* Beddome, 1886 (synonym of *P. perroteti* Duméril *et al.*, 1854)
36. *Plectrurus guentheri* Beddome, 1863\*
37. *Plectrurus aureus* Beddome, 1880\*
38. *Silybura canarica* Beddome, 1870 (now *Plectrurus canaricus*)\*
39. *Silybura nitida* Beddome, 1878 (now *Uropeltis nitidus*)\*
40. *Silybura ocellata* Beddome, 1863 (now *Uropeltis ocellatus*)\*
41. *Silybura ochracea* Beddome, 1878 (synonym of the former species)
42. *Silybura dupeni* Beddome, 1878 (synonym of *Uropeltis ocellatus*)
43. *Silybura dindigalensis* Beddome, 1877 (now *Uropeltis dindigalensis*)\*
44. *Silybura macrorhyncha* Beddome, 1877 (now *Uropeltis macrorhynchus*)\*
45. *Silybura nigra* Beddome, 1886 (synonym of *Uropeltis woodmasoni* (Theobald, 1876))
46. *Silybura shortii* Beddome, 1863 (synonym of *Uropeltis ceylanicus* Cuvier, 1829)
47. *Silybura nilgherriensis* Beddome, 1863 (synonym of the former species)
48. *Silybura nilgherriensis* var. *annulata* Beddome, 1886 (synonym of *U. ceylanicus*)
49. *Silybura madurensis* Beddome, 1878 (now *Uropeltis arcticeps madurensis*)
50. *Silybura nilgherriensis* var. *picta* Beddome, 1886 (synonym of the former species)
51. *Silybura rubromaculata* Beddome, 1867 (now *Uropeltis rubromaculatus*)\*

52. *Silybura nilgherriensis* var. *myhendrae* Beddome, 1886 (now *Uropeltis myhendrae*)\*
53. *Silybura broughami* Beddome, 1878 (now *Uropeltis broughami*)\*
54. *Silybura levingii* Beddome, 1878 (synonym of the former species)
55. *Silybura maculata* Beddome, 1878 (now *Uropeltis maculatus*)\*
56. *Silybura petersi* Beddome, 1878 (now *Uropeltis petersi*)\*
57. *Plectrurus pulneyensis* Beddome, 1863 (now *Uropeltis pulneyensis*)\*
58. *Rhinophis grandis* Beddome, 1867 (now *Uropeltis grandis*)\*
59. *Rhinophis sanguineus* Beddome, 1863\*
60. *Rhinophis microlepis* Beddome, 1863 (synonym of the former species)

#### COLUBRIDAE Opperl, 1811

61. *Oligodon travancoricum* Beddome, 1877\*
62. *Cercaspis travancoricus* Beddome, 1870 (now *Lycodon travancoricus*)\*
63. *Spilotes vittatus* Beddome, 1863 (now *Amphiesma beddomei* (Günther, 1864)  
[replacement name])
64. *Ablabes olivaceus* Beddome, 1863 (now *Rhabdops olivaceus*)\*
65. *Xylophis indicus* Beddome, 1878 (putatively a synonym of *Xylophis stenorynchus*  
(Günther, 1875))
66. *Psammophis indicus* Beddome, 1863 (synonym of *P. condanarus* (Merrem, 1820))

#### ELAPIDAE Boie, 1827

67. *Callophis concinnus* Beddome, 1863 (synonym of *Calliophis nigrescens* Günther, 1862)
68. *Callophis pentalineatus* Beddome, 1871 (synonym of *C. nigrescens*)
69. *Elaps cerasinus* Beddome, 1864 (synonym of *Calliophis bibroni* (Jan, 1858))

#### VIPERIDAE Boie, 1827

70. *Trimeresurus macrolepis* Beddome, 1862\*

For his extensive contributions to Indian herpetology, Beddome has been lauded by many of his contemporaries, peers and even some of the more recent workers in the field. Given below are a few examples of such tributes, one each from the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries so as to highlight this fact.

*“Lieut.-Col. Beddome’s collection contains all the specimens obtained by him during his residence in India, more especially the types of the numerous interesting forms discovered and described by him. Perhaps there is now no other part of India, the reptilian fauna of which is better known than the district explored by this indefatigable collector.”*

- Günther (1875).

*“...[Colonel Beddome]... exploited the South Indian Hills, including the Palni Hills, to such purpose in the seventies and eighties of the last century, that he has hardly left a snake for any later enthusiast to discover.”*

- Wall (1921).

*“He described the new genus Melanobatrachus and four other species. From the remarkable collections he made, Albert Günther and George Albert Boulenger could describe about 20 new species. The fact that six Western Ghats amphibians were named after him shows how amphibian specialists have accepted him as a recognized herpetologist.”*

- Biju (2001).

Some south Indian herpetological taxa described by his peers belong to his collections. Furthermore, and as can be expected, many of his peers named new south Indian herpetological taxa honouring him. These are listed below.

**(c) List of herpetological species named in honour of Beddome** (\* indicates species currently valid as Beddome’s eponym)

AMPHIBIA De Blainville, 1816

GYMNOPHIONA Rafinesque-Schmaltz, 1814

1) *Ichthyophis beddomei* Peters, 1879\*

ANURA Duméril, 1806

BUFONIDAE Gray, 1825

2) *Bufo beddomei* Günther, 1875\*



RHACOPHORIDAE Hoffman, 1932

- 3) *Philautus beddomei* (Günther, 1875)\*
- 4) *Rhacophorus beddomii* Boulenger, 1882 ((preoccupied); now known as *Rhacophorus calcadensis* Ahl, 1927 [replacement name])

PETROPEDETIDAE Noble, 1931

- 5) *Indirana beddomei* (Günther, 1875)\*

NYCTIBATRACHIDAE Blommers-Schlösser, 1993

- 6) *Nyctibatrachus beddomii* (Boulenger, 1882)\*

REPTILIA Laurenti, 1768

SQUAMATA Oppel, 1811

SAURIA Gauthier, 1984

GEKKONIDAE Gray, 1825

- 7) *Cnemaspis beddomei* (Theobald, 1876)\*

AGAMIDAE Gray, 1827

- 8) *Otocryptis beddomii* Boulenger, 1885\*

SCINCIDAE Gray, 1825

- 9) *Eutropis beddomii* (Jerdon, 1870)\*
- 10) *Kaestlea beddomii* (Boulenger, 1887)\*
- 11) *Ristella beddomii* Boulenger, 1887\*

LACERTIDAE Gray, 1825

- 12) *Ophisops beddomei* (Jerdon, 1870)\*

SERPENTES Linnaeus, 1758

TYPHLOPIDAE Merrem, 1820

- 13) *Typhlops beddomii* Boulenger, 1890\*
- 14) *Typhlops beddomei* (not of Boulenger, 1890) Wall, 1919 ((preoccupied); now *Typhlops tindalli* Smith, 1943)

UROPELTIDAE Müller, 1832

- 15) *Uropeltis beddomii* (Günther, 1862)\*

COLUBRIDAE Opperl, 1811

16) *Amphiesma beddomei* (Günther, 1864)\*

17) *Boiga beddomei* (Wall, 1909)\*

ELAPIDAE Boie, 1827

18) *Calliophis beddomei* Smith, 1943\*

This list shows that many of his peers such as Wilhelm Peters, Malcom Arthur Smith, William Theobald each (1/18 spp.=5.5%), Thomas Claverhill Jerdon, Frank Wall each (2/18 spp.=11.1%), Albert C.L.G. Günther (5/18 spp.=27.7%) and George Albert Boulenger (6/18 spp.=33.3%) have regarded Beddome as one of the foremost authorities on south India's herpetology. From as early as 1862 to as late as 1943, for over eight decades, several leading herpetologists have named new south Indian herpetological taxa after him which speak to the high regard in which they held him. The type localities of all the species listed above (in both lists b & c) are in southern India.

Beddome's legacy will not be forgotten but will continue to inspire present and future herpetologists to explore the diversity hidden within the last remaining forest patches of southern India.

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