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New Locality Records and Notes on the Scalation of the Alpine Punjab Skink, *Eurylepis taeniolata* Blyth 1854, from Himachal Pradesh, India

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The Alpine Punjab Skink, *Eurylepis taeniolata* Blyth 1854, ranges from Jordan to northwestern India (Feizi et al. 2016). Three subspecies are currently recognized, *E. t. arabica* (Szczerbak 1990), *E. t. parthianica* (Szczerbak 1990), and *E. t. taeniolatus* Blyth 1854 (Feizi et al. 2016). *Eurylepis t. taeniolatus* occurs in Pakistan and northwestern India (type locality: Punjab, Pakistan) (Feizi et al. 2016). This species has been recorded from only a few locations in northwestern India and accurate herpetofaunal records from Himachal Pradesh are lacking (Griffith et al. 2000; Saikia et al. 2007, Datta-Roy et al. 2017). Herein we report two additional records of *E. t. taeniolatus* from Himachal Pradesh, India.

The first individual was under a large boulder in a patch of alpine forest near Banjar, Kullu District, Himachal Pradesh, India (31.645833, 77.379722; elev. 1,431 m asl), at 0951 h on 5 July 2018. This individual was captured (permit number FFE-FB-F (10)-3/2017), photographed (Fig. 1) to collect morphometric data and confirm the identity of the species, and released at the site of capture. A photographic voucher was deposited in the University of Kansas Digital Archive (KUDA 14507), with the identity of the species independently confirmed by James Hicks.

A second individual was observed while active on a boulder along a river bank at 1047 h on 21 July 2018 at the same location as the first individual and was not captured or photographed. Habitat consisted of alpine coniferous forest with large boulders and bordered a large river. The nearest previously documented locality is in Sirmaur District approximately 110 km SSE of our record (Fig. 2); however, an exact location was not provided for this record (Saikia et al. 2007).

The identity of the species was determined by comparing our photographs with those of *E. t. parthianica* from Iran (Feizi et al. 2016) and using the following characteristics (Datta-Roy et al. 2017): midbody scale rows 23, supralabial



Figure 1. An adult Alpine Punjab Skink (*Eurylepis t. taeniolatus*) in alpine forest in the Kullu District, Himachal Pradesh, India, where it was found under a large boulder. Photograph by John Benjamin Owens.

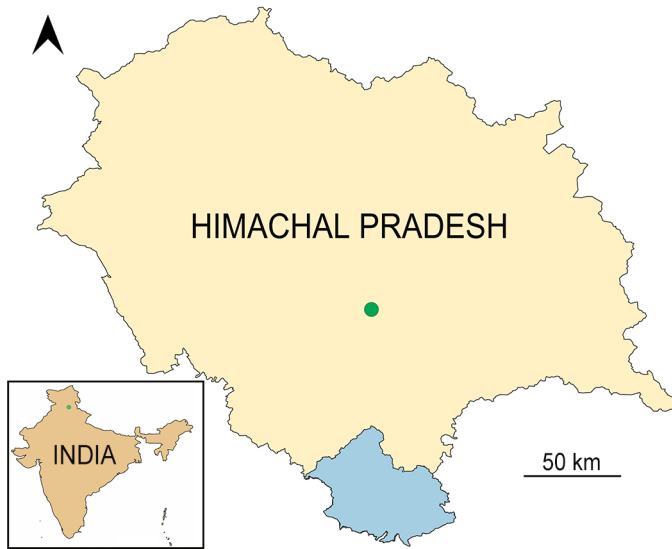


Figure 2. Map of Himachal Pradesh, India, showing the location where Alpine Punjab Skinks (*Eurylepis taeniolatus*) were observed in Kullu District (green dot) and the approximate location of the nearest previously recorded observation in Sirmour District (shaded blue).

scales 7–8, infralabial scales 7, loreal scales 2, enlarged vertebral dorsal scales 77 (Fig. 3), lamellae under third toe 9, lamellae under fourth toe 8, and third toe shorter than fourth. Our individual differed from descriptions in Datta-Roy et al. (2017) only in having 23 instead of 21 midbody scale rows.



Figure 3. An Alpine Punjab Skink (*Eurylepis t. taeniolatus*) from the Kullu District, Himachal Pradesh, India, showing diagnostic head scales (left) and enlarged vertebral dorsal scales (right). Photographs by John Benjamin Owens.

We returned to the site in July 2019 but failed to locate any additional individuals. The habitat had changed considerably since the previous year, with an increase in dense vegetation cover and signs of anthropogenic activities. Our observations demonstrate the need for future surveys to determine the distribution of this species in Himachal Pradesh.

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