Coral snakes of the family Elapidae are reportedly among the least known group of venomous snakes in Asia (Deepak et al., 2010; Ganesh & Ramanujam, 2014). Including the recently described *Calliophis castoe* Smith, Ogale, Deepak & Giri, 2012, five species have been reported from the Indian peninsula. Among them, three species *C. bibroni* Jan, 1858, *C. nigrescens* Günther, 1864 and *C. melanurus* (Shaw, 1802) are distributed in the Western Ghats landscape, south of Palghat Gap (Whitaker & Captain, 2004; Deepak et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2012; Ganesh & Ramanujam, 2014).

On 2nd January 2014, we recorded a dead coral snake while undertaking a roadkill survey, near Kallar (08.74129° N 77.12040° E, 420 m. a. s. l., Figure 1), Trivandrum District, Kerala State, India. The dead snake was studied in situ but was not collected or preserved, owing to lack of permits. The area adjacent to the road is covered by tropical evergreen forest. The snake was identified as Beddome’s coral snake *Calliophis beddomei* Smith, 1943 based on the following suite of characters: seven supralabials, 3rd in contact with prefrontal which separates pre-ocular and nasal (Figure 2), and 3rd and 4th supralabials in contact with eye. According to Smith (1943), 3rd supralabial separating pre-ocular and nasal is an important character that separates *C. beddomei* from other closely resembling congener, *C. nigrescens*. It had single pre-ocular, two post oculars, and the 4th and 5th supralabials touching the lower post-ocular; 5th, 6th and 7th supralabials touching the anterior temporal. The snake (unsexed, likely a female) was intact and measured 435 mm in total length (including 38 mm long tail). It had 234 ventrals and 32 pairs of subcaudals. The head, body and tail colouration of the specimen were: dorsum grey with black spots, venter scarlet red, subcaudals white flanked by scarlet red on either side, which matched with the descriptions provided by Ganesh & Ramanujam (2014). However, the ventral count of the present specimen (234) was on the higher side, which is closer to *C. nigrescens* species complex (Smith, 1943; Ganesh & Ramanujam, 2014).

Considering the ventral and subcaudal counts and the relative tail length, it is well possible that the present specimen could be an aberrant female of *C. beddomei*. So far, male specimens of *C. beddomei* with higher number of subcaudals and tail length have not been recorded. *Calliophis beddomei* is represented by only a few verified specimens and museum records, and hence variation in the ventral scale count might be due to intra-specific variation. Compared to earlier records (Smith, 1943; Ganesh & Ramanujam, 2014), lower

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**Figure 1.** Map of southern India showing the distribution of *Calliophis beddomei*. 
value for relative tail length for the present specimen originating from a distant locality indicates that the present individual may be a divergent lineage within *C. beddomei* group taxa. The species *C. beddomei* needs to be characterized with sufficient number of individuals representing both sexes. Despite being aware of such caveats that are inherent when dealing with very rare and poorly-known taxa, we allocate our individual to *C. beddomei*, with which it is the closest among all other recognised taxa that are currently considered valid (Smith 1943; Smith et al. 2012; Ganesh & Ramanujam, 2014).

The single record of the species, despite of various herpetofaunal studies in this region of southern Western Ghats during the past years (Chandramouli & Ganesh, 2011; Ferguson, 1895; Inger et al., 1984; Ishwar et al., 2001), including the ongoing study by these authors in Agasthyamalai landscape (from June 2012 onwards, about 1500 Man Hours of Visual Encounter Surveys), indicates the rarity and importance of the present finding. Including the present observation, *C. beddomei* is globally known only from four locations (Figure 1); Shevaroy Hills (Eastern Ghats), Mudumalai (Nilgiris) and Koppa in the Central Western Ghats (Smith, 1943; Ganesh & Ramanujam, 2014). The present record extends the range of *C. beddomei* south to about 320 km (straight-line) across Palghat and Shenkottah gaps, and wider distribution with respect to elevation (400 m -1500 m. a.s.l.) and aspects (both wind and leeward sides) of the mountain range. The present record of *C. beddomei* is an addition to the faunal list of Kerala State, India. We suggest further studies for better understanding on the morphological differences and geographical boundaries of this little known venomous and hence potentially medically important species endemic to the Eastern and Western Ghats of India.

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Figure 2. Entire view of *Calliophis beddomei* from Kallar, Kerala State (Inset: head showing diagnostic features). Photo by V J Jins
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