WORLD CONGRESS ON SNAKES

SNAKES OF THE WORLD

Recent Discoveries & Research Perspectives

Abstracts of the First World Congress on Snakes

1–4 October 2026
Kandy, Sri Lanka

Compilers

Anslem De Silva | Muhammad Rais
Nimal D. Rathnayake | Suranjan Karunarathna
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WCS 2026 SRI LANKA

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The Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystems (BOBLME) Project (Phase II) and the Korea Marine Environment Management Corporation (KOEM) funded Coastal and Marine Ecosystems Conservation and Management Project supported the Symposium on Sea Snakes at the World Congress on Snakes 2026, through IUCN Sri Lanka Country Office, in their efforts to raising awareness of neglected and under-represented ETP species groups, particularly sea snakes, and highlighting their conservation importance in the Bay of Bengal region.

The *Peltopelor* is figure 2 from plate 5 of La Cepède's (1789) *Histoire Naturelle des Serpens*. This specimen is an unlocated syntype of *Coluber capite-triangulatus Bonnaterre,* 1790 (currently classified as *Craspedocephalus trigonocephalus*), originally from the Cabinet du Roi in Paris.

Contents

Preface……..... viii

Message from the Congress Chairperson……..... ix

Message from the Secretary General ……..... x

Message from the Country Representative, IUCN Sri Lanka……..... xi

Message from the IUCN SSC Snake Specialist Group……..... xii

Message from the IUCN SSC Sea Snake Specialist Group……..... xiii

Message from the IUCN SSC Viper Specialist Group…….....xiv

Oral and Poster Abstracts

Theme A. Understanding snake diversity through time and lineage reconstruction *(Systematics, Taxonomy, Nomenclature and Evolutionary Biology of Snakes)* ……..15-44

Theme B. Field-based understanding of snake behaviour, ecology, and interactions *(Natural History, Ecology and Life History Strategies of Snakes)* ……..45-85

Theme C. Structure and function — the mechanics that make serpents what they are *(Anatomy, Physiology and Functional Morphology of Snakes)* ……..86-94

Theme D. The molecular machinery that shapes snake biology and adaptation *(Genetics, Genomics, Cellular and Molecular Biology of Snakes)* ……..95-98

Theme E. From molecules to medicine — the chemistry of snakes and their potential *(Biochemistry, Metabolomics, Venomics and Chemical Ecology of Snakes)* ……..99-103

Theme F. Global perspectives on snakebite — from prevention to treatment *(Snakebite Epidemiology, Clinical Management and Public Health)* ……..104-124

Theme G. Safeguarding snakes and their habitats under global pressure *(Threats, Conservation, and Environmental Change on Snakes)* ……..125-155

Theme H. Snakes as symbols, resources, and neighbours in human society *(Socioeconomic, Cultural and Ethical Dimensions of Human–Snake Interactions)* ……..156-164

Theme I. Science and management of captive snakes for research, conservation, and welfare *(Snake Husbandry, Breeding, and Veterinary Science)* ……..165-176

Theme J. Digital tools redefining snake research and conservation *(Technological Innovation and Data-Driven Approaches for Snakes)* ……..177-181

Theme K. Bridging science, policy, and society for a sustainable coexistence *(Policy, Governance and Global Collaboration for Snake Conservation)* ……..182-190

Theme L. Holistic, cross-disciplinary frameworks for a sustainable future *(Integrated Approaches to Snake Research, Conservation and Human Wellbeing)* ……..191-194

A 27 - Rech *et al.*

Hidden Diversity Beneath the Surface: Comparative Skull Morphology in Typhlopid Blind Snakes of the Genus *Letheobia* (Serpentes: *Typhlopidae*) via Micro-CT

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Most blind snakes of the family Typhlopidae look very similar externally and are often difficult to distinguish morphologically. However, they exhibit considerable diversity in cranial anatomy. Variation occurs not only in overall skull shape but also in the size, arrangement, presence and fusion of individual bones. The genus *Letheobia* (Afrotyphlopinae) currently comprises 37 recognized species. Although the external morphology of most species is relatively well documented, the cranial anatomy of *Letheobia* has never been investigated. Using high-resolution micro-computed tomography (micro-CT), we examined and compared the skulls of ten type specimens representing nine currently recognized species and one synonymized taxon*: L. akagerae, L. buchholzi (synonym of L. decorosa), L. debilis, L. decorosa, L. episcopus, L. gracilis, L. graueri, L. lumbriciformis, L. pembana*, and *L. simoni*. *Letheobia episcopus* and *L. simoni* skulls differ markedly from the remaining taxa in possessing a unique condition of fused frontal-parietal and basioccipital-parabasisphenoid elements, whereas these bones remain separate in all other examined species. The parietal is paired in six species, but a fused parietal was observed in the type specimen of *L. decorosa* and in the specimen assigned to its synonym *L. buchholzi*. This shared character provides further morphological evidence that they are conspecific. Our study provides a first comparative assessment of *Letheobia* skull morphology and reveals substantial cranial variation within the genus. This demonstrates the high systematic value of cranial characters and highlights their potential for species delimitation, taxonomic revision, and future phylogenetic studies within *Letheobia* and other typhlopid snakes.

Keywords: Afrotyphlopinae, Computer Tomography, Fossorial Snakes, *Letheobia*, Cranial Osteology

Sri Lanka has a long cultural connection with snakes, especially the cobra or Nāga. The Cūḷavaṃsa records that King Buddhadāsa (341–370 CE) treated a diseased cobra (Cūḷavaṃsa 37.118–120). Nāgas were also linked with water, fertility and protection, and cobra images were placed near reservoirs and sluices as guardians of water resources.

118 - “At these kind words of the King, the snake stuck his whole neck into the cavity (of the white ant-heap) and remained lying motionless.”

119 -“He stepped up to it, took the knife that he wore at his side and slit open the belly of the snake.”

120 -“After he had taken out the diseased parts and applied an excellent remedy, he at once cured the reptile.....”

Cūḷavaṃsa 37.118–120

We at IUCN, International Union for Conservation of Nature, with a vision for a just world that values and conserves nature, wishes the first World Congress on Snakes will bring tangible outcomes to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature!