

Beyond the known limit: a maximum size record for the Common Wolfsnake, *Lycodon aulicus* (Linnaeus, 1758), from Pune, Maharashtra, India

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The Common Wolfsnake (*Lycodon aulicus*) is a non-venomous, oviparous, nocturnal colubrid widely distributed throughout India. At hatching, these snakes measure 140 mm and adults have been known to measure up to 800 mm in total length (Whitaker and Captain, 2004). The maximum documented lengths previously reported for this species are 710 mm (Boulenger, 1893), 760 mm (Smith, 1943), 765 mm (Daniel, 2002), 800 mm (Whitaker and Captain, 2004), 820 mm (Karthikeyan, 1993), 840 mm (Patil and Mirza, 2007; India Biodiversity Portal), 920 mm (Vyas and Patel, 1995), and 950 mm (Sharma, 2007).

On 10 March 2026 at 20:11 h, an adult *L. aulicus* (Fig. 1) was rescued from a densely populated informal settlement in Dapodi, Pune, Maharashtra, India (18.5794°N, 73.8342°E). The individual was documented photographically and subsequently released. The total length (TTL) of the unsexed individual measured 1021 mm, comprising a snout–vent length (SVL) of 870 mm and a tail length (TL) of 150 mm (Fig. 1C). To obtain the measurement, the snake was manually straightened to the extent possible alongside a measuring tape on a flat surface and measured multiple times.

The snake exhibited diagnostic characters typical of *L. aulicus*, including a dark brown dorsum with narrow pale whitish cross-bands along the body, a flattened head distinct from the neck, and smooth dorsal scales. Scale were counted using the method of Smith (1943) to confirm identification and to rule out similar congeners. The following characters were recorded: nine supralabials (SL) with SL3, SL4, and SL5 in contact

with the eye, SL1 and SL2 were touching the nasal; 17–17–15 dorsal scale rows, 217 ventrals (Fig. 1B), cloacal covering comprising two scales, and 71 paired subcaudals (Fig. 1D). Notably, the 950 mm record reported by Sharma (2007), the largest previously reported value, lacked supporting documentation or voucher specimen data, limiting its independent verification.

The measurements of this snake surpasses all previously reported maximum total lengths for *L. aulicus*. Previously reported maximum sizes for *L. aulicus* show considerable variation, and many of these accounts were not properly documented and their independent verification is not possible (Karthikeyan, 1993; Vyas and Patel, 1995; Sharma, 2007; Vyas, 2016). According to Daniel (2002), *L. aulicus* attains a maximum TTL of 76.5 cm and individuals measuring > 61.0 cm were considered uncommon. Later, Whitaker and Captain (2004) reported a maximum TTL of 80 cm, while Patil and Mirza (2007) mentioned specimens reaching a TTL 84 cm. Earlier, Karthikeyan (1993) had documented a specimen measuring 82 cm, and Vyas and Patel (1995) reported the longest known female individual of the species at a TTL of 92 cm (SVL 81.0 cm + TL 11.0 cm). These published observations collectively indicate that relatively larger specimens of the species have been recorded over time. In comparison with all earlier available records, the present observation of *L. aulicus*, supported by photographic evidence, repeated measurements, scale counts, and independent expert confirmation, represents the largest and most recent verified record for the species to date, and provides a well-documented reference for the upper size range of the species.

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Figure 1. The longest *Lycodon aulicus* on record, discovered in March 2026 in Maharashtra, India. The individual in (A) dorsal and (B) ventral views. (C) The snake positioned against a tape measure showing that its length exceeds 1 m (1021 mm). (D) Ventral view of the tail, allowing a subcaudal count. Photos by Mahesh Bilaskar.

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