

# CENTRAL UNIVERSITY OF ODISHA, KORAPUT

## OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC RELATIONS

PRESS RELEASE, DATE: 20.03.2023

### **New Earthworm Species Discovered in Odisha's Eastern Ghats by CUO: A Breakthrough in Biodiversity Research**

In a groundbreaking discovery, researchers from the Central University of Odisha, Koraput, in collaboration with scientists from Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala, have unearthed two previously unknown species of *Megascolex* earthworms from the Eastern Ghats of Odisha.

Ms. Ayusmita Naik, during an extensive earthworm diversity study across various regions of Koraput, stumbled upon large earthworm specimens from Rani Duduma and the Jeypore Ghati area. Under the guidance of Prof. Sharat Kumar Palita, Dean of the School of Biodiversity and Conservation of Natural Resources at CUO Koraput, the specimens underwent meticulous examination in laboratory settings.

With the assistance of Dr. R. Paliwal, a retired Scientist from the Zoological Survey of India, and earthworm specialists Dr. Prasantha Narayanan and Dr. A.P. Thomas from Mahatma Gandhi University, these specimens were identified as two distinct species previously unknown to science: *Megascolex jeyporeghatiensis* and *Megascolex quadripappilatus*. The findings have been published in the prestigious international taxonomic journal *Zootaxa*.

Belonging to the *Megascolex* genus, these earthworms were discovered in the relatively unexplored hills of the Eastern Ghats in Odisha, adding to the biodiversity of Peninsular India. They are characterized by unique features such as two pairs of spermathecal pores and the absence of penial setae and calciferous glands. These species thrive in deciduous forests with brownish gravel-loamy soils.

Endemic to India, specifically the Koraput District of Odisha, these species mark a significant addition to the earthworm diversity in the region. Their discovery expands the known range of *Megascolex* species into the northern Eastern Ghats, previously limited to the southern Western Ghats.

*M. jeyporeghatiensis* was discovered in moist deciduous forests near Jeypore Ghati and Rani Duduma, while *M. quadripappilatus* was found in dry deciduous forests near Rani Duduma. These earthworms are anecic worms, feeding on woody and fibrous materials of the forest floor, and play a crucial role in maintaining soil health and productivity by consuming fibrous plant material and aiding in carbon sequestration.

Prof. Chakradhar Tripathi, Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor of Central University of Odisha has hailed this as a great achievement for the scientific community of CUO and stressed the need for this type of basic research which can put CUO on the world map. He congratulated the team of researchers involved in this discovery.

Prof. S. K. Palita, Dean of the School emphasized the significance of this discovery, highlighting the need for continued biodiversity research through funding by Govt. bodies and conservation efforts in the Eastern Ghats region. They anticipate further discoveries and call for increased government funding to explore and protect the rich biodiversity of Odisha's Eastern Ghats.

Dr. Phagunath Bhoi, Public Relations Officer