

The Taxonomic History, Geographical Distribution and Status of Sri Lankan Jackal

U Jayaweera^{1#} and SSSeneviratne¹

¹Faculty of Science, University of Colombo, Colombo 03, Sri Lanka

[#]sam@sci.cmb.ac.lk

Abstract

The Eurasian Golden Jackal (*Canis aureus*) is found in Europe and Asia. It is the only wild dog species found in Sri Lanka. The taxonomic status of the Sri Lankan jackal, however, is ambiguous, and its distribution is poorly studied. Here we provide a critical overview of the taxonomic history and a detailed description of the geographical distribution of the jackal in Sri Lanka. The taxonomic history of the species was reviewed using the scientific literature and specimens in major collections. The name of the species based on morphology first appeared in Linnaeus (1758), followed by Kelaart (1852) as *Canis aureus*. Sri Lankan jackal was treated as an endemic subspecies to the island; *C. aureus lanka* in Ellerman & Morrison-Scott (1951) and in Philips (1984) or as a subspecies endemic to both Southern India and Sri Lanka; *C. aureus nariya* in Wroughton (1916). Later, Philips (1935) elevated the Sri Lankan jackal to a full species; *Canis lanka* Philips (1935). To map the density and geographical distribution of the jackal, a questionnaire-survey and sighting-reports were used across the country, covering major agro-climatic zones. The jackal inhabits throughout the island in low densities. In several regions in the dry zone, it has a denser population. It is rare above 1500 m of elevation. Questions based on recent population trends in the questionnaire suggested a recent decline in the jackal population across the country. It is emphasized here that the importance of a molecular phylogenetic study to verify taxonomic status and a systematic island-wide survey to assess the population size for this species.

Keywords: *Canis aureus*, *Sri Lanka*, *Wildlife management*