AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS

Kinghorn, J. Roy, 1942. Herpetological Notes No. 4. *Records of the Australian Museum* 21(2): 118–121. [8 July 1942].

doi:10.3853/j.0067-1975.21.1942.265

ISSN 0067-1975

Published by the Australian Museum, Sydney

HERPETOLOGICAL NOTES NO. 4.

By J. R. KINGHORN.

(Figure 1.)

This paper contains the description of a new species of *Typhlops*; notes on *Denisonia daemelii*, *Acanthophis pyrrhus*, *Hydrophis ornatus ocellatus*, and remarks on the status and affinities of *Demansia psammophis*, *Denisonia fasciata*, *Oedura rhombifer* and *Oedura marmorata*.

Typhlops yirrikalae, sp. nov.

(Figure 1.)

Definition.—Nasal cleft in contact with the first labial. Scales in 24 rows round the centre of the body. Head and snout rounded. Nostrils inferior, nasal not completely divided, the nasal cleft terminating a fraction in front of the nostril, and not visible from above. Rostral from above, rounded, as broad as long, more than half the width of the head, and not extending back to the level of the eyes; the portion visible from below is broader than long. Preoculars narrower than the nasals, the latter forming a narrow suture, separating the prefrontal from the rostral. Frontal smaller than the prefrontal. Parietals and inter-parietals about equal in size, but not much larger than the nuchals. Total length 182 mm. Width about 3 mm.

Colour, in spirits.—Uniform yellowish, with no indication of spots or striations.

Locality.—Yirrikala Mission Station, near Caledon Bay, Arnhem Land, Northern Territory.

Affinity.—The general shape of the head of *T. yirrikalae* is like that of its nearest relative *T. nigrescens*, but it differs in having 24 rows of scales, the nasal groove terminating just beyond the nostril, and a broader rostral.

Holotype.—In the Australian Museum, Reg. No. R.12381. Described from a single specimen, collected by the Rev. W. Chaseling.

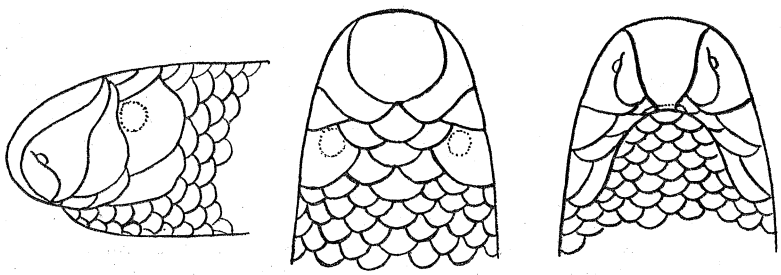

Figure 1.—*Typhlops yirrikalae*, sp. nov.

Demansia psammophis Schlegel.

Elaps psammophis, Schlegel, Phys. Serpens., ii, 1837, p. 455.
Diemenia psammophis, Blgr., Brit. Mus., Cat. Snakes, iii, 1896, p. 322.
Demansia torquata, Gnth., Ann. Mag. Nat. Hist., (3), ix, 1862, p. 130.
Diemenia olivacea, Blgr., Brit. Mus., Cat. Snakes, iii, 1896, p. 323.
Elapognathus ornaticeps, Macl., Proc. Linn. Soc. N.S.W., ii, 1878, p. 221.
Diemenia ? ornaticeps, Blgr., Brit. Mus., Cat. Snakes, iii, 1896, p. 324.

There has been a great deal of confusion regarding this and allied species; and like Loveridge I have always found great difficulty in identifying some specimens from Boulenger's key and descriptions. When Loveridge reduced *T. olivacea* to subspecific rank, and suggested that perhaps *psammophis, olivacea* and *torquata* were related even more closely to each other than the term subspecies indicated, his action caused me to examine all the specimens in the Australian Museum collection, together with Macleay's type of *Demansia ornaticeps* and a second and larger Macleay specimen from Darwin. At present I am unable to examine material from all Australian collections, but have sufficient before me to go further than Loveridge, and place *olivacea, torquata* and *ornaticeps* in the synonymy of *psammophis.*

Loveridge suggested that *torquata* may not be anything other than a colour mutant of *psammophis*, but I think that I am right in regarding it, as well as *ornaticeps* and the smaller, more highly marked, specimens of *olivacea*, as juvenile stages only. It is true that there is a tremendous difference between the young *torquata*, with its black head and two outstanding white bars on nape, and the adult *olivacea*, with no distinctive markings other than a few dark spots on the head shields. It might be advisable to support these contentions by directing attention to the various stages of *Demansia textilis*; the adult being uniform brown of various shades, whilst the young, even those from the same batch of eggs, may be variously marked, some being uniformly brown, others bear dark cross bars, and most have a black head crossed with white occipital bars somewhat similar to *torquata.*

Until recently, when specimens typical of *torquata* were found at two points in western Queensland (Cooper's Creek and Mount Morgan), this form may have been regarded geographically as from the coastal areas only, but a specimen from Port Darwin, collected in 1923, has very definite, though faded, *torquata* markings, and is a link between *torquata* and the younger *olivacea.*

A very small specimen from Groote Eylandt, Gulf of Carpentaria, the same size as Macleay's *ornaticeps*, is identical in scalation with the latter. In colour it resembles *ornaticeps*, except that there are no markings on the upper head shields, and the markings on labials, chin and throat are frecklings rather than blotches.

An important fact which must be recorded here is that my figure of *ornaticeps*[1] was from a wrongly identified specimen, now known to be *Aspidomorphus muelleri muelleri*, which superficially resembles *D. ornaticeps.* I have examined Macleay's type of the latter and find the canthus somewhat rounded (often a characteristic of very young specimens), but the head is deep at the sides, the eye is very large, more than twice as deep as its distance from the mouth, and equal to its distance from the rostral. The markings on the head are patterned in whorls and crescents, not spots as in *Aspidomorphus*, though they are ringed with a lighter colour. The head shields are elongated, and typical of the genus *Demansia.* A noteworthy feature is that the anal shield is divided, not entire as described by Macleay.

Specimens marked as *torquata* are from the following Queensland localities: Percy Island, 250 mm. long; Hughenden, 350 mm.; two from Hayman Island, Whitsunday Passage, 290 mm.; Mount Morgan, 380 mm.; and Nappapari, Cooper's Creek, 650 mm.; the markings of latter being more like those of *olivacea* than *torquata.*

A specimen from Darwin, Northern Territory, so badly damaged about the head that it was about to be discarded, has proved a useful link. It is 600 mm. long, but retains many of the head markings of younger specimens of the *torquata* type.

Macleay's Darwin specimen measures 550 mm., and retains only an indication of the head coloration typical of *torquata.*

Denisonia fasciata Rosen.

Denisonia fasciata, Rosen, Ann. Mag. Nat. Hist., (7), xv, 1905, p. 179. Loveridge, Bull. Mus. Comp. Zool., Harvard, lxxvii, p, 1934, p. 287.

Denisonia maculata, var. *fasciata*, Kinghorn, Snakes of Australia, sm. 8vo, Sydney, 1929, p. 173.

[1] Kinghorn.—Snakes of Australia, 1929, p. 142, fig. 83.

I have examined a specimen from Malcolm, Western Australia, and agree with Loveridge that it is deserving of full specific rank. Superficially the markings resemble those of *D. maculata devisii*, but closer inspection shows the head to be paler, with a few dark spots. There is an irregular dark stripe from the rostal through the eye to the temporal region. The labials are white—not vertically striped as in *devisii*—and the dark zig-zag cross markings on the dorsal surface are more irregularly disposed. The nasal shield is entire and narrowly in contact with the preocular on the right side, but not in contact on the left. The frontal is much longer than broad, and is longer than in *devisii*. The remaining head shields also are elongated, making the head longer in relation to its breadth in comparison to *devisii*. There are 163 ventrals and 29 subcaudals.

Denisonia daemelii Gunther.

Hoplocephalus daemelii, Gunth., Journ. Mus. Godeffroy, xii, 1876, p. 46.

Previously regarded as a Queensland species, this snake has been found at Mount Harris, 30 miles north-west of Nyngan, in central New South Wales. It is a particularly robust specimen, measuring 445 mm. in length, of which the tail is 93 mm. The scales are in 17 rows; anal divided; ventrals 165; subcaudals 45. Boulenger gives the scalation as ventrals 160; subcaudals 39; 147 + 33, and 153 + 45.

Acanthophis pyrrhus Boulenger.

Two specimens recently were received from Hermannsburg, Central Australia. Specimen (A): total length 550 mm.; scales in 21 rows at centre of body; ventrals 145; subcaudals 47 (36 single, 11 paired). Specimen (B): total length 640 mm.; 21 rows of scales; ventrals 150; subcaudals 54 (29 single, 25 paired). The stomach of (B) contained four lizards (*Lygosoma lesueurii*).

Hydrophis ornatus ocellatus Gray.

Hydrophis ocellata Gray, Brit. Mus. Cat. Snakes, 1849, p. 53.

Hydrophis ornatus ocellatus, Malcolm Smith. Mon. Sea Snakes, 1926, p. 84. H. H. Scott, Proc. Roy. Soc. Tasm., 1931 (1932), p. 111. Kinghorn, Snakes of Australia, sm. 8vo, Sydney, 1929, p. 112, fig.

Some years ago Scott recorded this species from Scamander, east coast of Tasmania. The scalation and general characters show an interesting variation from the typical, and are recorded as follows: Scales, round the neck 39; at centre of body 58; ventrals 110; subcaudals 46. There are six upper labials, 1 preocular, 2 postoculars on the left side and 4 on the right. The total length 1310 mm., of which the tail measures 150 mm. The general colour is slate grey above and yellowish white below. The narrow dorsal bands are yellow, and the small spots above the larger ocellate markings are pale blue. Numbers of irregularly disposed dark markings are scattered along the abdominal region.

Oedura rhombifer Gray.

Oedura rhombifer Gray, Zool. "Erebus" and "Terror", 1884, Reptiles, pl. xvi, fig. 6.

Three Western Australian specimens in the Old Collection, previously identified as *lesueurii* (?), are referable to this species. One is from Perth, and two from Boulder, all collected in 1900.

Whilst they agree in markings with the published figure, the tail is not perfectly cylindrical, but is somewhat flattened like that of *lesueurii*. The abdominal scales are mostly hexagonal, the remainder being more evenly rounded.

It is difficult to decide whether they are closer to *rhombifer* or *lesueurii* but form an undoubted link between the two species, and only through lack of further material do I hesitate to relegate *rhombifer* to the synonymy of *lesueurii*.

Oedura marmorata Gray.

Oedura mamorata Gray, Zool. Miscell., 1842, p. 52. Loveridge, Bull. Mus. Comp. Zool. Harvard, lxxvii, 6, 1934, p. 309.

Several specimens from Yirrikala Mission Station, Northern Territory, exhibited such extremely variable markings, in addition to variations or abnormalities in the rostral, mental and chin shields, that I have made an examination of the complete series in the Australian Museum, and unhesitatingly support Loveridge, who placed the several previously accepted species in the synonymy of *O. marmorata.* On extreme colour markings, previously regarded as typical, these species might easily have been regarded as distinct, and it is as such that I have grouped them, but found with these were intermediate kinds which linked all together.

With the exception of *marmorata* Gray and *meyeri* Garman, which have been taken on the coastal areas, the remaining forms are found mainly on the plains, western slopes or tablelands. It appears that the very young specimens are more often distinctly banded—black and greyish-white—and I assume that these bands disappear with age, giving way to spots and ocellate markings. With the exception of the young banded forms, *O. monolis*, figured by Fry,[2] bears the most outstanding markings.

Among those labelled *cincta*, *tryoni* and *marmorata*, there are many intermediate forms, and though these may be from one or widely separated localities, it is impossible to group them as geographical races.

Loveridge suggests that the lateral stripes of *fracticolor* may have been formed by the coalescence of the more usual markings. I suggest that *fracticolor* may have been described from immature specimens before the markings had broken up.

Loveridge made a thorough examination of the scalation of the various forms, and found that variations in the rostral, mental, infralabials, etc., were abnormalities, and individual rather than specific. An examination of the series before me supports this, and I have little hesitation in agreeing with him in placing *tryoni*, *fracticolor*, *ocellata*, *cincta*, *monolis*, *castelnaui*, and *meyeri* in the synonymy of *marmorata.*

On colour markings the series in the Australian Museum were previously grouped, with their localities, as follows:

Oedura tryoni.

Queensland: Cunnamulla, one; Eidsvold, five; Frazer Island, one; north, one; unlocalized, two.

New South Wales: Narromine, one; Moree, two; Tumut, one; Inverell, one (incorrectly recorded from Tamworth by Fry).

Oedura monolis.

New South Wales: Trangie, one (figured by Fry); Mungindi, one (collected by the late D. A. Porter of Tamworth; subsequently recorded by Fry as from there and so referred to by Loveridge, but it had an attached label localizing it from Mungindi); unlocalized, two.

Oedura cincta.

Queensland: Charleville, two. Exchanged with the Queensland Museum—most probably examined by De Vis. Cannot be separated from *ocellata.*

Oedura ocellata.

New South Wales: Ivanhoe, one; Carinda via Coonamble, one. The former is heavily spotted between the cross bands; the later has very few spots.

Oedura marmorata.

Northern Territory: Port Essington, two; Yirrikala Mission Station, six.

Queensland: Cape York, one; Almaden, four; Bowen River, two.

New South Wales: Moree, one.

Unlocalized: three.

The young black and white banded forms are from Yirrikala Mission Station, Northern Territory; western Queensland; New South Wales; and locality (?).

[2] Fry.—Herpet. Notes, Proc. Roy. Soc. Qld., 1915, xxvii, 4, pp. 86-87, pl. iii, fig. 2.