

***Antaresia* (Pythonidae), Taxonomy and Nomenclature: Fixing up errors and oversights including that *Antaresia maculosa peninsularis* Esquerre *et al.* 2021 is a junior synonym of *A. maculosa brentonoloughani* Hoser, 2003. ICZN Code Rule of Priority applies (Article 23).**

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ABSTRACT

Since Hoser (2003) formally named the so-called Blonde Spotted Python as *A. maculosa brentonoloughani* numerous others have conducted research into the genus confirming the taxonomy and nomenclature of Hoser (2003, 2004, 2009) and the earlier Hoser (2000), being the definitive recent works on the taxonomy of the genus.

Significantly in 2021, renegade reptile hobbyist Damien Esquerre and friends published molecular corroboration of the earlier papers of Hoser with respect of the genus *Antaresia* Wells and Wellington, 1984. In an act of egregious taxonomic vandalism they renamed *A. maculosa brentonoloughani* Hoser, 2003 as *Antaresia maculosa peninsularis* Esquerre *et al.* 2021.

Through websites their cohort control, including "The Reptile Database" at: <http://www.reptile-database.org/>, as well as via next-level "search engine optimisation" (SEO) they have aggressively promoted their new name since April 2021, which fails to comply with the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* (including each of Articles 8, 9 and 23) and is therefore not available in zoological nomenclature.

Simultaneously they have aggressively suppressed the ability of others to even locate the correct ICZN name *A. maculosa brentonoloughani*.

To counteract this unscientific activity, this paper cites Article 23 of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* (Ride *et al.* 1999) (the Code), being the rule of priority to formally synonymise *A. maculosa peninsularis* with the correct ICZN name *A. maculosa brentonoloughani* without the need to invoke other sections of the Code rendering the later nomen effectively unavailable.

The taxon to which the name *A. papuensis* Esquerre *et al.*, 2021 was applied is also effectively unnamed because of non-compliance with the Code.

However to satisfy the urge of Esquerre *et al.* to be able to claim to have "discovered" a species of snake (as per their many thousands of tweets and the like), it is not renamed herein, so as to allow Esquerre *et al.* a chance to fix their nomenclatural mess, best satisfied by republication in a Code compliant manner.

In line with Hoser (1989) and other later publications of Hoser, Esquerre *et al.* (2021) also found the Kimberley population of putative *A. childreni* to be distinct from all others in Australia.

By oversight this population has not been formally named by anyone, even though Hoser (1989) recognized it as unique and divergent.

Esquerre *et al.* (2021) decided to synonymise it with *A. childreni* (Gray, 1842), in what is believed to be a taxonomic error and so is herein named according to the Code as *A. kimberleyae* sp. nov..

Keywords: Snakes; taxonomy; nomenclature; Australia; Queensland; Northern Territory, New South Wales; Queensland; Western Australia; Pythons; Children's Python; Spotted python; Ant-hill python; blonde spotted python; *Antaresia*; *stimsoni*; *perthensis*; *saxacola*; *campbelli*; *maculosa*; *childreni*; *brentonoloughani*; *papuensis*; taxonomic vandalism; *peninsularis*; new species; *kimberleyae*.

INTRODUCTION

There have been numerous major publications over the past 40 years dealing with the taxonomy and nomenclature of the so-called Children's Pythons, genus *Antaresia* Wells and Wellington, 1984.

Between them Cogger (1975, 2000, 2014), Cogger *et al.* (1983), Hoser (1981a-c, 1982, 1988, 1989, 1991b, 1993b, 1994, 1995, 1999a-d, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2009, 2012a-c) and Wells and Wellington (1983, 1984) have set out the relevant taxonomies, available names and synonymies.

Relevant herein has been the formal recognition of *Antaresia perthensis* Stull, 1932 as a valid species (then placed in the genus *Liasis* Gray, 1842), first done in recent times by Hoser (1981). Prior to that publishing authors such as Cogger (1975) had synonymised it with *A. childreni* (Gray, 1842) which was a consensus position in Australian herpetology at the time.

Wells and Wellington (1984) and again in a second paper dated 1985, in the first major revision of the taxonomy of Australian herpetofauna, erected the genus *Antaresia* for the so-called Children's Pythons, including the Ant-hill Python, being *A. perthensis* and at the same time named a species, *A. saxacola* with a type locality of Barrow Creek in the Northern Territory.

They recognized the tropical snakes as *A. childreni* and the east coast spotted ones as *A. maculosa* (Peters, 1873).

A year later in 1986 Smith renamed the putative species from arid Australia as "*A. stimsoni* Smith, 1985" based on material from Western Australia.

The paper was published in 1986, but backdated a year to try to claim priority over *A. saxacola*, by Wells and Wellington the year prior.

Since then, most Australian herpetologists have recognized the species as first delineated by Wells and Wellington in 1984 and 1985, but for which they have publicly been given zero credit for.

The three main species, being *A. maculosa*, for the spotted East Australian forms (generally called Spotted Pythons), *A. stimsoni* or Stimson's Pythons for all the well-marked specimens from arid parts of Australia and *A. childreni* for the so-called Children's Pythons from the top end of the Northern Territory and Kimberley district have formed the cornerstone of the classification of the genus ever since, with the now widely recognized *A. perthensis* seen as an outlier in the group, based on its significantly different morphology and body size.

A. perthensis was placed in the subgenus *Rawlingspython* by Hoser (2009), affirmed by Hoser in (2012).

Wells and Wellington have both contended since 1985, that their *A. saxacola* was of a different species to *A. stimsoni* and so while publicly protesting acts of taxonomic vandalism against other taxa named by them, they have been content to let *A. stimsoni* be the name of choice for all the arid zone snakes pending later revalidation of their allegedly different form *A. saxacola*.

Other taxonomic acts and events relevant to the genus were as follows:

1/ The naming of a second western Australian population of *A. stimsoni* as *A. stimsoni orientalis* by Smith in his same paper of 1986, backdated to 1985 (both placed in *Liasis* at the time).

The subspecies has been rarely recognized as distinct since that date.

2/ Cogger (2000) formally adopted use of the name *Antaresia* for the relevant snakes, being the general precursor for the name being accepted as correct within Australia.

3/ Hoser (2000) treated *A. saxacola* as a senior synonym of *A. stimsoni*, consistent in all subsequent papers by the same author to present and also formally named as a subspecies the western New South Wales population, as *A. saxacola campbelli* Hoser, 2000.

4/ Hoser (2003) formally named the so-called Blonde Spotted Pythons from far north Queensland as *A. maculosa brentonoloughnani*, a designation rapidly accepted within the hobbyist and breeder community, but generally not adopted in

printed material such as books, which instead simply continued to refer to them as "blonde macs" due mainly to the actions of Wolfgang Wüster and his cohort as detailed by Hoser (2009, 2012a-c, 2013, 2015a-f, 2017 2019a-b) and Hawkeswood (2021).

5/ Adoption of the Wells and Wellington and Hoser taxonomies and nomenclature was hampered by a series of at least three failed applications to the ICZN by Wolfgang Wüster and his gang of thieves to formally suppress the names proposed by the three authors (Hoser 2007, ICZN 1991, 2001, 2021).

While the applications all ultimately failed, the Wüster gang deliberately gave the impression to others that the names would be ruled invalid by the ICZN as per Shine (1987), Shea (1987) and Rhodin *et al.* (2015), detailed by Hoser (2015a-f, 2019a-b, 2021), Wellington (2015) and Hawkeswood (2021) and so many publishing authors were cautious and simply avoided using the correct ICZN names.

The intent of the applications by Wolfgang Wüster and his cohort was always stated as being to enable them to steal "name authority" for the same taxa. See for example Kaiser (2012a, 2012b, 2013) and Kaiser *et al.* (2013), the latter and Kaiser (2012b) being a document actually written by Wüster himself as stated by Kaiser (2012a), where he explicitly states he is not a co-author of a document that a year later had the heading amended to bear his name as the lead author.

In terms of the relevant Hoser names, they were subject of an ICZN Application by Rhodin *et al.* (2015), which the authors said superseded their claims in Kaiser *et al.* (2013) which ultimately failed (ICZN 2021).

That is the ICZN ruled all Hoser names were available for nomenclature.

This final outcome is significant in terms of what follows.

6/ Also in published in 2021, was a summary of a study of the genus *Antaresia* by Esquerré, Donnellan, PavónVázquez, Fenkera and Scott Keogh (2021), which had some molecular data. This paper renamed *A. maculosa brentonoloughnani* as *A. maculosa peninsularis* in line with the dishonest edicts of the Wüster gang, not to cite works of Hoser or Wells and Wellington (see the explicit instruction in Kaiser *et al.* (2013) or much the same in Rhodin *et al.* (2015), even though all the most substantive features of the paper were effectively lifted directly from these earlier authors.

In an act of plagiarism, Esquerré *et al.* (2021) made a point of not citing or acknowledging the essential earlier works of Wells and Wellington (1984, 1985) or Hoser (1981a-c, 1982, 1988, 1989, 1991b, 1993b, 1995, 1999a-d, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2009, 2012a-c).

7/ Esquerré *et al.* (2021) also formally named the New Guinea *Antaresia* as *A. papuensis* based on a newly obtained specimen. That this taxon was a different species had been known for many years and it was the absence of material that had delayed its formal description by anyone else, including both Wells and Wellington or Hoser.

8/ That Esquerré *et al.* (2021) had published the new synonym name *A. maculosa peninsularis* in anticipation of an ICZN ruling against the works of Hoser including Hoser (2003), giving their name priority over any later ones, was confirmed by the stated submission date to their journal of 2 December 2020 and an alleged publication date of 21 April 2021, which predated the publication of the ICZN ruling in favour of Hoser's publications by some 9 days (30 April 2022).

9/ *A. maculosa brentonoloughnani* Hoser, 2003 with a Zoobank registration of:

LSIDurn:lsid:zoobank.org:act:78D58A61-6FE9-40BA-9137-C6057DDD75FB

has a holotype of specimen number R16772 at the Australian Museum, Sydney, Australia, type locality being 16 km east of Coen, Queensland (Lat. 13° 55' S, Long. 143° 11' E).

A. maculosa peninsularis was published in the online PRINO (peer reviewed in name only) journal *Molecular Phylogenetics*

and Evolution.

It was confirmed as an online only journal on the first page of the pdf for the 19 page paper, which reads "Available online 21 April 2021". The document citation and header, does not have page numbers as would be the case in a printed paper, instead reading as follows:

"Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution 161 (2021) 107181"

The latter number cannot be any relevant page numbers in some forthcoming printed document, as it does not match a document of 19 pages.

The holotype for their alleged new subspecies was written as "Holotype. SAMA R12797 (female), collected at Cooktown, Queensland, Australia (15.47°S; 142.25°E) by H. Ehmann in November 1971."

Cooktown is proximal to Coen and as seen on Fig 3, of page 7 of Esquerré *et al.* (2021), these authors have identified the two type forms as being of one and the same subspecies.

NON COMPLIANCE WITH THE INTERNATIONAL CODE OF ZOOLOGICAL NOMENCLATURE BY ESQUERRE ET AL. 2021 AND ALSO ESQUERRE ET AL. 2020.

In terms of the recent acts by Esquerré *et al.* (2021) the following is important:

1/ The *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* (Ride *et al.* 1999) (The Code), states in the preamble:

"Priority of publication is a basic principle of zoological nomenclature"

In the rules themselves there is **Article 23**, which says:

"Article 23. Principle of Priority

23.1. Statement of the Principle of Priority. The valid name of a taxon is the oldest available name applied to it."

Because *A. maculosa brentonoloughnani* with a Zoobank registration of:

LSIDurn:lsid:zoobank.org:act:78D58A61-6FE9-40BA-9137-C6057DDD75FB

and with a holotype of specimen number R16772 at the Australian Museum, Sydney, Australia, type locality being 16 km east of Coen, Queensland (Lat. 13° 55' S, Long. 143° 11' E), has an 18 year date priority over *A. maculosa peninsularis* that is the name that must be applied to this taxon.

2/ On the basis of the preceding, I hereby formally synonymise *A. maculosa peninsularis* with *A. maculosa brentonoloughnani* Hoser, 2003, with *A. maculosa brentonoloughnani* hereby being the only correct available name and valid name for the taxon.

3/ As of 27 May 2022, the name *A. maculosa peninsularis* was not registered with Zoobank (at: <http://www.zoobank.org/>), the ICZN repository for new names.

Under the ICZN's amendment to the Code, published online, Zoobank registration is mandatory for new names published electronically.

In any event the publication of Esquerré *et al.* (2021) violates Article 9.9 of the "*Amendment of Articles 8, 9, 10, 21 and 78 of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature to expand and refine methods of publication*" as published online at:

<https://www.mapress.com/zootaxa/2012/ff/z03450p007.pdf>.

in 2012 (ICZN 2012), making their new name *A. maculosa peninsularis* unavailable for nomenclature.

The same applies for their other new name *A. papuensis* also unavailable for nomenclature.

4/ The preceding also applies almost in identical form for the coined name *Nawaran* Esquerré, Donnellan, Brennan, Lemmon, Lemmon, Zaher, Grazziotin and Keogh, 2020, which they alleged had a type species of "*Nictophilypython oenpelliensis* Gow 1977" (sic) or "*Python oenpelliensis* Gow, 1977".

That genus name is an objective junior synonym of *Nyctophilopython* Wells and Wellington, 1985, with the same type species of *Python oenpelliensis* Gow, 1977, so on that basis is unavailable for zoological nomenclature for this taxon, relying again on Article 23 of the Code.

13/ Once again, Esquerré *et al.* (2020) had published a rubbish paper without Zoobank registration in a PRINO online journal without Zoobank registration, making the publication and name in violation of Article 9.9 of the "*Amendment of Articles 8, 9, 10, 21 and 78 of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature to expand and refine methods of publication*" as published online at: <https://www.mapress.com/zootaxa/2012/ff/z03450p007.pdf>.

in 2012 (ICZN 2012), making their new name *Nawaran* further unavailable for nomenclature.

5/ In terms of putative *A. papuensis* it would be easy for me to rush to print and erect a new name for the taxon, to claim "name authority", but to do so would be arguably unethical. This is exactly the sort of thing Wolfgang Wüster and the gang do regularly, and for me to be seen to be doing the same, would drag me down to their low level of egregious behaviour.

6/ So as to allow Damien Esquerré to satisfy his urge to have "discovered" a new species (evidenced by the many thousands of boastful twitter posts himself and his cohort made in April 2021), I instead make it known his errors and suggest he fix up the nomenclature of his "new species" in order to make the name available for use in zoological nomenclature. This clearly and self-evidently includes by way of proper Zoobank Registration for his next online incursion into taxonomy.

He and his co-authors will be sent copies of this paper shortly after publication in hard copy and/or via email.

THE OTHER ANTARESIA SPECIES

While most of what Esquerré *et al.* (2021) was not in itself new, they did in effect publish a molecular corroboration of what had been known for decades.

Significantly they did also show with their new-found, taxpayer funded, molecular data the following:

1/ *Antaresia perthensis* diverged from other *Antaresia* by their estimate between 5 and 10 MYA, confirming that the Hoser (2009) sub-genus level separation into *Rawlingspython* was correct.

2/ *Antaresia saxacola* as originally described by Wells and Wellington (1985) was a separate entity to "*A. stimsoni* Smith, 1985". While Esquerré *et al.* decided to lump all bar the *A. maculosus* group and *A. perthensis* into the synonymy of *A. childreni*, they could have easily gone the opposite way and split in line with the six clades they identified in their Fig 3 on page 7, which were identified as "the six identified genetic populations (K) for the *childreni* / *stimsoni* dataset, sorted by clade".

The decision to lump taxa was allegedly driven by evidence of admixture between populations at the margins of distribution and populations intersecting.

However in reality it was probably more deeply driven by a desire to not be forced to recognize taxa formally identified and named in the first instance by Wells and Wellington (1984, 1985) as set out in Hoser (2007) and ICZN (1991, 2001) and the taxa of Hoser (2000, 2003) as set out in Kaiser (2012a, 2012b, 2013), Kaiser *et al.* (2013) and detailed in Hoser (2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2015a-f, 2019a-b).

While Esquerré *et al.* (2021) alleged admixture of all populations of putative "*A. stimsoni*" and "*A. childreni*" at the edges of each population, giving rise to the decision to synonymise all forms into *A. childreni*, the decision to treat *A. maculosa* as separate must be further called into question bearing in mind captive hybridisation and wild hybridisation between both *A. maculosa* and putative "*A. stimsoni*" from eastern Australia has been known for years. See for example Eipper and Eipper (2019), who in their relatively small book refer to hybridisation between the two species in the wild twice.

3/ Putative *A. saxacola campbelli* with a centre of distribution in the Western Murray/Darling Basin and nearby ranges to the immediate west was also shown to be distinct, with potential for elevation to full species.

4/ A suspected taxon on western lower Cape York was flagged as distinct, but for the time being is herein left unnamed.

5/ The authors confirmed at species level, the divergence of the Eastern Cape York population formally named by Hoser in 2003 as detailed already (see above), asserting that *A. maculosa brentonoloughnani* Hoser, 2003 (which they misidentified as *A. maculosa peninsularis*) diverged from their nearest relative (type *A. maculosa*) somewhere between 1.47 and 3.15 MYA, which is clearly a species-level divergence.

6/ The authors confirmed, what had long been known in that New Guinea *Antaresia* were of a different species to the Australian ones (see above). Their name is not ICZN Code compliant, meaning the taxon currently remains effectively unnamed.

7/ There was insufficient evidence to recognise *A. stimsoni orientalis* Smith, 1986 as a valid subspecies, which has been agreed with herein.

8/ The morphologically divergent Kimberley population identified as distinct by Hoser (1989), was identified as such by Esquerré *et al.* (2021) with minimal admixture of genetic material from outside.

With that in mind, and the relevant comments in Hoser (2020), based on a potentially similar situation with regards to the taxonomy of closely related forms as outlined in that paper, I revisited earlier publications and specimens with a view to naming this as a potential new taxon.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Inspection of original descriptions of all *Antaresia* species or subspecies was undertaken.

This in turn was combined with relevant morphological and molecular studies that have been published including estimated dates of divergence and reconciliation of these with biogeographical and climatic events and changes.

The known distributions were matched with known biogeographical barriers and areas of likely absence, to confirm that given populations were or were not interbreeding.

Finally relevant specimens, living, dead or from photos with good quality location data was inspected to confirm consistent differences and included determination whether or not the Kimberley form of putative *A. childreni* was distinct at either the species or subspecies level.

Literature relevant to the taxonomy and nomenclature of the Kimberley form of putative *A. childreni*

included Boulenger (1893), Cogger (1975, 2000, 2014, Cogger *et al.* (1983), Esquerre *et al.* (2012), Gray (1842), Hoser (1981b, 1988, 1989, 1991b, 1992, 1993b, 1994, 1995, 1999a-d, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2009, 2012b, 2020), ICZN (1991, 2001, 2021), Eipper and Eipper (2019), Kluge (1963), O'Shea *et al.* (2004), Peters (1873), Ride *et al.* (1999), Smith (1986), Stull (1932), Wells and Wellington (1984, 1985) and sources cited therein.

The vast body of literature that merely rehashes what is published in the preceding books or papers is not cited or necessary in terms of this paper, but is mentioned as this body of literature is huge and I do not wish to be accused of failing to consult the relevant literature or plagiarising some uncited source.

However I note that based on past performances the Wolfgang Wüster gang will lie about this sort of thing anyway (see Hoser 2015a-f for example).

RESULTS

Based my field observations of a distinct break between each of putative *A. childreni* from the Northern Territory, *A. stimsoni* from the Pilbara and Great Sandy Desert, and then the Kimberley form of putative *A. childreni*, derived from more than 50 years of working with the relevant taxa, I had no hesitation in giving putative *A. childreni* from the Kimberley district of Western Australia full taxonomic recognition.

The only question was whether or not this should be in terms of being a species or subspecies.

Notwithstanding the decision of Esquerré *et al.* (2021) to synonymise all putative *A. childreni* with *A. stimsoni* which I disagree with, I find that on the same evidence, the divergence of

the relevant populations (1 to 1.5 MYA) is sufficiently strong and ancient as to warrant formal description as a full species.

The decision is also made in line of the significant morphological divergence of the relevant forms.

I note that there are no pre-existing names for the relevant taxon.

Both *A. childreni* (Gray, 1842) and *Nardoa gilberti* Gray, 1842 are of the Northern Territory variant of *A. childreni*, making neither name available for the Kimberley population, with that taxon restricted to this area. All of *A. stimsoni* (Smith, 1986), *A. stimsoni orientalis* (Smith, 1986) and *A. saxacola* Wells and Wellington, refer to different putative taxa from the arid zone of central-west Australia, with *A. campbelli* Hoser, 2003, referring to a taxon from the arid zone of eastern Australia.

The species *A. maculosus* (Peters, 1873) type specimen is from Mackay, Queensland, being south of the Burdekin Gap, making it not applicable to the Kimberley taxon.

North of the Burdekin Gap (i.e. about Townsville and north), north of which on the coast is *A. brentonoloughnani* (Hoser, 2003), herein elevated to a full species and restricted to the eastern Cape York region. The name *A. peninsularis* Esquerre *et al.* (2012), is a synonym of *A. brentonoloughnani* and therefore not a valid name under Article 23 of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* (Ride *et al.* 1999, as amended online in 2012, via ICZN 2012). In any event, it breaches Article 9.9 of the Code, and therefore is an unavailable name also.

The name *A. papuensis* Esquerre *et al.* (2021) applies to the New Guinea taxon only and in any event was also published in breach of Article 9.9 of the Code, and therefore is not an available name.

A photo of *A. brentonoloughnani* in life from the type locality is depicted online at:

<https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/84723997>

and clearly matches the relevant images for putative "*A. maculosus peninsularis* Esquerre *et al.* (2012)", the invalid junior synonym.

Because the Kimberley taxon, currently being treated as a population of *A. childreni* is taxonomically divergent and distinct, and there is no available name, it is formally described below according to the rules of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* (Ride *et al.* 1999, as amended online in 2012, via ICZN 2012) as a new species, being *Antaresia kimberleyae* sp. nov.

INFORMATION RELEVANT TO THE FORMAL DESCRIPTION THAT FOLLOWS

In terms of the description that follows, the following should be noted:

There is no conflict of interest in terms of this paper or the conclusions arrived at herein.

Several people including anonymous peer reviewers who revised the manuscript prior to publication are also thanked as are relevant staff at museums who made specimens and records available in line with international obligations.

In terms of the following formal descriptions, spelling should not be altered in any way for any purpose unless expressly and exclusively called for by the rules governing Zoological Nomenclature as administered by the International Commission of Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN).

This includes if gender assignment of relevant suffix seems incorrect, Latinisation is wrong, apparent spelling mistakes and so on (see Article 32.5.1 of the Code).

Material downloaded from the internet and cited anywhere in this paper was downloaded and checked most recently as of 27 May 2022 (including if also viewed prior), unless otherwise stated and was accurate in terms of the content cited herein as of that date.

Any online citations within this paper, including copied emails and the like, are not necessarily cited in the references part of this paper and have the same most recent viewing date as just given.

Unless otherwise stated explicitly, colour and other descriptions

apply to living and **fully mature adult specimens** of generally good health, as seen by day, and not under any form of stress by means such as excessive cool, heat, dehydration, excessive ageing, abnormal skin or reaction to chemical or other input.

While numerous texts and references were consulted prior to publication of this paper, the criteria used to separate the species has already been spelt out and/or is done so within the formal description and does not rely on material within publications not explicitly cited herein.

ANTARESIA KIMBERLEYAE SP. NOV.

LSIDDurn:lsid:zoobank.org:act:CE83292D-52F5-4964-8CBE-8E28C5370DC5

Holotype: A preserved specimen at the Western Australian Museum, Perth, Western Australia, Australia, specimen number WAM R60694 collected from the Mitchell Plateau, in Western Australia, Australia, Latitude 14.8026° S., Longitude 125.8232° E.

This government owned facility allows access to its holdings.

Description of holotype: In life it is depicted in Smith (1985) in figure 1 at the top of page 259.

Paratype: A preserved specimen at the Western Australian Museum, Perth, Western Australia, Australia, specimen number WAM R60677 collected from the Mitchell Plateau, in Western Australia, Australia, Latitude 14.8026° S., Longitude 125.8232° E.

Diagnosis: *Antaresia kimberleyae* sp. nov., from the Kimberley district of Western Australia, treated until now as a variant of the Children's Python, *Antaresia childreni* Gray, 1842, from the tropics between western Cape York, Queensland in the east and the far east Kimberley in Western Australia in the west is most easily separated from that taxon by having smaller dark spots or blotches on the dorsal surface, than seen in type *A. childreni*. If these are counted in a line slightly left or right of the mid dorsal line, running from the nape to the body posteriorly to the pelvic girdle, there are more than 100 in *A. kimberleyae* sp. nov. (usually about 110 in most specimens, with N = 10), versus less than 100, (usually about 88 in most specimens, with N = 10). Some specimens in both *A. kimberleyae* sp. nov. (commonly) and *A. childreni* (uncommonly) may appear faded in patterning to make the dorsal pattern hard to detect, especially in aged specimens, where fading occurs, a situation also seen in *A. perthensis* Stull, 1932, examples of which are published in Hoser (1989) at page 191.

The iris of *A. kimberleyae* sp. nov. is a strong reddish-orange colour, versus beige, yellowish or orange-tinged in *A. childreni*. The upper labials of *A. kimberleyae* sp. nov. while lightish in colour are not an immaculate cream or white as is the case in *A. childreni*.

A. kimberleyae sp. nov. also has a head that is relatively shorter in length in adults than in *A. childreni*. In *A. childreni* it is 2.3 times as long as wide (N = 10), versus 2 times as long as wide in *A. kimberleyae* sp. nov. (N = 10).

The shape of the head is also different in both species. In *A. kimberleyae* sp. nov. the narrowing from back of head to snout is more-or-less even, including as one moves just posterior to the eye in a forward direction. By contrast in *A. childreni* the head narrows significantly just posterior to the eye moving in an anterior direction.

A. kimberleyae sp. nov. and *A. childreni* are separated from all other species in the genus *Antaresia* Wells and Wellington, 1984, by having a dorsal body pattern that is reduced somewhat, or if prominent, usually only anteriorly, (although the pattern is usually seen for the entire body length) with smallish spots or blotches arranged in longitudinal series and if larger blotches are present, even these are invariably broken or differentiated along the mid-dorsal line, and there is little or no evidence of a pale stripe along the lower part of neck and anterior body.

This is in contrast to the other six similar species in the genus, these being *A. saxacola* Wells and Wellington, 1985, *A. stimsoni*

(Smith, 1985), *A. campbelli* (Hoser, 2003), *A. maculosa* (Peters, 1873), *A. brentonoloughani* (Hoser, 2003) and the currently unnamed species from Torres Strait and New Guinea.

In these species the dorsal spotting or banding typically crosses and runs over the mid-dorsal line, at least occasionally, and the pattern is bold being on a light cream, beige or yellow background.

A. saxacola Wells and Wellington, 1985, *A. stimsoni* (Smith, 1985) and *A. campbelli* (Hoser, 2003) are separated from *A. maculosa* by having a dorsal pattern of well-defined smooth edged blotches, bars, bands or similar and having a well-developed pale stripe on the lower part of the neck. In contrast, *A. maculosa* (Peters, 1873), *A. brentonoloughani* (Hoser, 2003) and the currently unnamed species from Torres Strait and New Guinea all have a dorsum with a pattern of dark, ragged edged blotches which invariably coalesce on the anterior and posterior parts of the body and there is either no pale stripe along the lower part of the neck and anterior body, or it is otherwise not prominent.

The other species in the genus *A. perthensis* (Stull, 1932) (subgenus *Rawlingspython* Hoser, 2009), is readily separated from the others in *Antaresia* Wells and Wellington, 1984, by having 35 or fewer mid-body rows and less than 250 ventrals, versus higher than this in all other species.

Pythons in the genus *Antaresia* Wells and Wellington, 1984 are separated from all other Australian pythons by having a unique combination of teeth on the premaxilla, scales on the rear of the body with at least one or two apical pits and two or more loreal scales.

A. kimberleyae sp. nov. in life is depicted in Smith (1985) on page 259 in two images and online at:

<https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/118893592>

and

<https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/4994463>

and

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/54876436@N08/14185849617/>

A. childreni in life is online at:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/moloch05/46133708832/>

and

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/92868532@N06/38985827370/>

and

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/chrisjolly1989/35063248976/>

In line with Esquerre *et al.* (2021), and in contrast to Eipper and Eipper (2019), the putative taxon *A. stimsoni orientalis* Smith, 1986 is not regarded herein as valid and so is effectively disregarded in terms of the preceding formal description. The characters of *A. stimsoni* as outlined herein, also apply to putative *A. stimsoni orientalis* Smith, 1986.

Distribution: *A. kimberleyae* sp. nov. is essentially confined to the Kimberley District of Western Australia, excluding the far east Kimberley region, being a western Australian endemic.

Etymology: The species *A. kimberleyae* sp. nov. is named in honour of my daughter, Adelyn Kimberley Hoser, this name being taken from her middle name, Kimberley, in recognition of her contributions to herpetology over her lifetime spanning more than 20 years so far.

It is coincidental that the species is effectively confined to the Kimberley region of Western Australia, but the suffix "ae" reflects the snake is named in honour of a female person, as opposed to "ensis" as would be the case if it was named in reflection of where it comes from.

SUMMARY

While the conservation status of the new species *A. kimberleyae* sp. nov. appears to be secure, such situations have changed rapidly for other species.

In the long term the best hope for this and other Kimberley forms is to keep global and local human population growth low, preferably reducing human numbers long term, in line with the

comments in Hoser (1989, 1991a, 1993a, 1996).

In terms of the long-term conservation of this species and potential declines through unforeseen circumstances, the comments of Hoser (2019a, 2019b) also apply.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

None.

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