

A new species of *Litotescincus* Wells and Wellington, 1985 from south-west Tasmania.

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ABSTRACT

The genus name *Litotescincus* Wells and Wellington, 1985, type species *Mococa metallica* O'Shaughnessy, 1874 has been effectively unused in herpetology since it was coined by the original authors. However recent phylogenetic studies including that of Pyron *et al.* (2013) have effectively validated the placement of the species group into its own genus (apart from all other available names) and so the name is used here.

A population of skinks until now treated as a regional variant of the widespread species *L. metallica* (O'Shaughnessy, 1874), from southern Tasmania is herein described as a new species *L. wellsii* sp. nov..

It is named in recognition of the perceptive contributions to herpetology by the lead author of Wells and Wellington (1985), namely Richard Wells.

Significantly in their 1985 paper Wells and Wellington wrote of the species *L. metallica*: "Herein regarded as a complex of a number of undescribed species".

This paper effectively confirms that view.

Keywords: Taxonomy; Nomenclature; Skinks; Tasmania; Australia; genus; *Litotescincus*; *Carinascincus*; synonym; invalid genus; *Niveoscincus*; taxonomic vandalism; thieves; species; *metallica*; *wellsii*.

INTRODUCTION

The genus name *Litotescincus* Wells and Wellington, 1985, type species *Mococa metallica* O'Shaughnessy, 1874 has been effectively unused in herpetology since it was coined by the original authors.

At the same time, the same authors proposed hundreds of names for various species and genera in Australia and New Zealand and history has shown their judgements to be mainly correct.

This includes as seen in the major work of Cogger (2014), which is littered with Wells and Wellington "names" throughout the book's over 1000 pages.

The three major works by Wells and Wellington in the period 1983-1985, including that which coined the name *Litotescincus*, were the subject of an attempted suppression by a band of thieves intent on stealing the "name authority" for the hundreds of species and genera formally named by the two men in these works. This history was outlined by the ICZN in their final decision of 1991 (see anonymous 1988 and ICZN 1991).

A second similar attempt by Robert Sprackland to steal "name authority" for the taxon described as "*Odatria keithhornei* Wells and Wellington, 1985" failed (ICZN 2001). Sprackland had attempted to name the same species after his wife, even though he knew he was engaging in a highly illegal act of taxonomic vandalism.

"Name authority" for taxa is legally owned intellectual property and cannot be stolen or misappropriated and this was made

known to the ICZN in a submission in the 1980's (see Hoser 2015a-f and sources cited therein).

The relevant species is now known as *Shireenhosersaurea keithhornei* (Wells and Wellington, 1985), as defined by Hoser (2013).

More recent campaigns by the same band of thieves to steal "name authority" from myself (Hoser), and Wells again are outlined by ICZN (2000) and Hoser (2015a-f, including sources cited therein).

Recent phylogenetic studies including that of Pyron *et al.* (2013) have effectively validated the placement of the species group *Litotescincus* Wells and Wellington, 1985, type species *Mococa metallica* O'Shaughnessy, 1874 as conceived by Wells and Wellington into its own genus and so the name *Litotescincus* is used here, being the only correct available name for the species group.

The genus name *Carinascincus* Wells and Wellington, 1985, type species *Leiolopisma greeni* Rawlinson, 1975 has been applied to the *Mococa metallica* O'Shaughnessy, 1874 species group by many authors in the period since 1991, including the conservative Hal Cogger in Cogger (2014).

However on the basis of the morphological differences between the relevant type species and the published molecular results of Pyron *et al.* (2013), it is self evident that in time *Litotescincus* will be the properly applied genus name to the relevant species group.

In 1990 and in a foolish anticipation of an illegal ICZN ruling

against the works of Wells and Wellington, Hutchinson *et al.* (1990) unlawfully coined the name *Niveoscincus* (with the same type species as *Carinascincus*) in order to scoop "name authority" from others.

The name was widely used for a short time including in some of the references cited, but as it is an illegal junior synonym, with no potential for proper useage under the rules of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* (Ride *et al.* 1999), it is no longer used by professional herpetologists anywhere.

Mention is made of the band of thieves known as the Wüster gang, as detailed by Hoser (2015a-f) and sources cited therein, who continue to illegally coin and use names in order to try to improperly steal name authority from other authors, including Wells and Wellington. On a site they control, called "Reptile Database" ostensibly managed by one Peter Uetz, as recently as early 2016, when this paper was being finalized, the illegal name *Niveoscincus* was being touted as the correct name for the genus *Carinascincus* (Uetz 2016a).

To justify his illegal actions, Uetz, claimed to be operating under the auspices of a so-called "Scientific Advisory Board" that he had allegedly appointed (Uetz 2016b). However the membership list is in the main part the band of thieves and "non-scientists" comprising the Wüster gang, with such names as the criminal Mark O'Shea from the UK, Wüster himself (from Wales) and another well-known thief by the name of Steven Blair Hedges (Uetz 2016a, 2016b).

Hence they are using the Uetz site to foist their illegal brand of nomenclature and fictional taxonomy, including for example the various imagined *Leiopython* species invented by Wulf Schleip in 2008 (Schleip 2008, as detailed by Hoser 2009) on the rest of the world, trying to portray the site as some kind of "official" scientific portal.

Mention is made of all these antics in this paper because as a result of the highly illegal extreme taxonomic and nomenclatural vandalism of the Wüster gang, it is likely that people will continue to see the unlawful name *Niveoscincus* applied to the species discussed within this paper, including for example in some of the otherwise very useful references cited herein.

As part of an audit of skinks assumed to be within the species *L. metallica* I determined that a population from the far south-west of Tasmania, treated until now as a variant of *L. metallica*, was in fact a very different species.

This population of skinks until now treated as a regional variant of the widespread species *L. metallica* (O'Shaughnessy, 1874), from southern Tasmania is herein described as a new species *L. wellsi sp. nov.*

It is named in recognition of the perceptive contributions to herpetology by the lead author of Wells and Wellington (1985), namely Richard Wells.

Significantly in their 1985 paper Wells and Wellington wrote of the species *L. metallica*: "Herein regarded as a complex of a number of undescribed species".

This paper effectively confirms that view.

Significant data in relation to this species and other so-called variants of *L. metallica*, including those from southern Victoria was seized in an illegal armed raid on our facility on 17 August 2011 (Court of Appeal Victoria 2014, VCAT 2015). In spite of court orders to return all stolen goods, much was not and that which was came back was generally irreparably damaged. It isn't necessary to detail other violent illegal acts committed during the armed raid, such as shoving guns in the faces of vulnerable young children, killing of supposedly protected native fauna, to wit snakes, all filmed by the government wildlife officers themselves as they committed their crimes, most of which was later played back to them in a court of law.

What is significant is that the theft of this material delayed the publication of this paper indefinitely. However I have decided that five years hence, the conservation imperative to formally

name undescribed taxa outweighs any defects caused by less data being available at the time of publication. Hence this paper is published now.

Published literature relevant to the species *L. metallica* and *L. wellsi sp. nov.* as described herein include the following: Brongersma (1942), Chapple and Swain (2004), Cogger (2014), Gray (1845), Greer (1982), Hutchinson and Schwaner (1991), Hutchinson *et al.* (2001), Melville and Swain (2000a, 2000b), O'Shaughnessy (1874), Rawlinson (1975), Wells and Wellington (1983, 1985), Wilson and Swan (2010), Wu *et al.* (2014) and sources cited therein.

LITOTESCINCUS WELLSI SP. NOV.

Holotype: A preserved specimen at the National Museum of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia, Museum Victoria Herpetology Collection, Catalogue number D62303, collected from New Harbour, South-west Tasmania, Australia, Latitude -43.52, Longitude 146.17.

The National Museum of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia is a government-owned facility that allows access to its holdings.

Diagnosis: *Litotescincus wellsi sp. nov.* is similar in most respects to *L. metallica*, the species it was previously treated as. However it is readily separated from that species by colouration. This species is characterised by being heavily striped (unlike *L. metallica*) and lacks significant dorsal or lateral speckling found on typical *L. metallica*. Furthermore *Litotescincus wellsi sp. nov.* have strongly keeled scales, not seen in *L. metallica*.

Diagnostic characters for separation of *L. wellsi sp. nov.* and *L. metallica* (treated as the same species) from all other *Litotescincus* and *Carinascincus*, all treated as *Carinascincus* is in Cogger (2014).

Distribution: Far south-west Tasmania only.

Etymology: The species is named in recognition of the perceptive contributions to herpetology by the lead author of Wells and Wellington (1985), namely Richard Wells, now currently resident of near Lismore, northern New South Wales, Australia.

NOTES ON THIS DESCRIPTION FOR ANY POTENTIAL REVISORS

Unless mandated by the rules of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature*, the spelling of the newly proposed name should not be altered in any way.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author has no known conflicts of interest in terms of this paper and conclusions within.

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