

A new subspecies of *Tropidonotus* from Morotai Island, Indonesia.

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ABSTRACT

A new subspecies of *Tropidonotus* from Morotai Island, Indonesia is formally described according to the rules of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* (Ride *et al.* 1999). It is similar in most respects to *Tropidonotus truncatus* (Peters, 1863) from the adjacent Halmahera Island, but is separated from that taxon by its significantly higher subcaudal and ventral counts.

Keywords: Taxonomy; reptilia; squamata; nomenclature; snake; Morotai Island; Indonesia; *Tropidoniophis*; *truncatus*; *newspecies*; *morotaiensis*.

INTRODUCTION

As part of an audit of the snakes and lizards of the New Guinea region, it came to my attention that a specimen of snake assigned by an earlier author (Tanner, 1950) to the species *Tropidonotus truncatus* (Peters, 1863) from Morotai Island, North Moluccas, Indonesia was significantly divergent from that form, even though it is known from an immediately adjacent island (Halmahera).

While there is a deep sea channel between the two islands, they are proximal (about 15 km straight line at the nearest points) and in the absence of molecular data, I would not separate the two at species level. I do note however that sea-depth measurements indicate the two land masses remained separated (just) by sea during the most recent glacial maxima, although it appears (based on extant sea depth maps) this distance was only in the order of 1-2 km in width.

See details at: <https://maps.ngdc.noaa.gov/viewers/bathymetry/>
Hence the description below of this new subspecies made in accordance with the rules of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* (Ride *et al.* 1999).

MATERIALS, METHODS AND RESULTS

These are inferred and effectively stated in both the abstract and introduction and self evident in the description that follows.

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

SUBSPECIES *TROPIDONOPHIS TRUNCATUS MOROTAIENSIS* SUBSP. NOV.

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Holotype: A preserved specimen at the Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, United States of America, specimen number BYU 7482 Collected at Morotai Island, North Moluccas, Indonesia. This facility allows access to its holdings.

Diagnosis: *Tropidonotus truncatus morotaiensis* subsp. nov. has until now been treated as an inular race of *Tropidonotus truncatus* (Peters, 1863) originally described from Halmahera Island, (type locality) being adjacent to the south and separated by a straight line distance over water of about 15 km from nearest points on extant islands.

Tropidonotus truncatus morotaiensis subsp. nov. is separated from *T. truncatus* (Peters, 1863) as defined by Boulenger (1893) at page 216 or De Rooij (1915) at pages 77-78 by having 155 ventrals and 48 subcaudals versus 142-149 ventrals and 43 subcaudals in the nominate subspecies.

Tropidonotus truncatus morotaiensis subsp. nov. is further identified by the following suite of characters: Rostral almost as high as broad, visible from above, making a broad straight suture with the internasals, which are smaller than the prefrontals; frontal two-thirds the length of the parietals; loreal as broad as long; 2 pre-oculars and 2 postoculars; temporals 1 + 1; 8 upper and 9 lower labials; 3 lower labials in contact with the first pair of chinshields which are shorter than the posterior pair; 15 rows of mid-body scales; ventrals 155; subcaudals 48 all divided; anal divided.

Color in life is black above except for a reasonably prominent white nuchal band and dark brown on the head; ventral colour is black except for some white mottling on the chin, labial and anterior ventral scales (derived from Tanner, 1950).

Distribution: Known only from Morotai Island, North Moluccas, Indonesia.

Etymology: Named in reflection of where this taxon occurs.

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