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A new species of *Ophioscincus* Peters, 1873 (Reptilia: Squamata: Scincidae) from south-east Queensland.

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ABSTRACT

A new species of *Ophioscincus* Peters, 1873 from south-east Queensland, Australia superficially similar to *Ophioscincus ophioscincus* (Boulenger, 1887) is formally described and named for the first time in accordance with the rules of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* (Ride *et al.* 1999).

Keywords: Lizards; reptilia; skink; Queensland; Australia; *Ophioscincus*; Mount Glorious; Brisbane; New species; *paulwoolfi*.

INTRODUCTION

Over some decades of fieldwork in south-east Queensland, Australia, I have caught a number of skinks that were tentatively identified and keyed out as *Ophioscincus ophioscincus* (Boulenger, 1887).

However in the relevant period, noticeable morphological differences between specimens found north of the Bundaberg dry zone and south of the Bundaberg dry zone were self evident, leading to a more detailed line of investigation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Revisiting the above situation and viewing more specimens in Queensland during a field trip in mid 2019, led to the inescapable conclusion that more than one species was involved.

A review of the morphology of relevant specimens was conducted as was a survey of regions of likely habitats and potential biogeographical barriers.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The species group clearly included at least two species and populations were well separated by dry zones of habitat not occupied by any relevant specimens. These dry zones are not of recent genesis and so I have concluded that the differences are significant and of species level.

The northern form is that which type specimen of *Ophioscincus ophioscincus* (Boulenger, 1887) is.

This means the southern form from the environs of Brisbane, Queensland is that which until now has been undescribed.

It is herein named as a new species, *Ophioscincus paulwoolfi sp. nov.*.

Little has been published to date on the species *Ophioscincus ophioscincus* (Boulenger, 1887). However literature consulted as relevant to the conclusions herein included the following: Boulenger (1897), Cogger (2014), Cogger *et al.* (1983), Peters (1874) and Wells and Wellington (1984, 1985).

In terms of the description herein and this paper, the relevant new species name should not be altered by later authors unless mandated by the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* (Ride *et al.* 1999) or later equivalent document. There are no conflicts of interest in terms of this paper.

OPHIOSCINCUS PAULWOOLFI SP. NOV.

LSIDurn:lsid:zoobank.org:act:B49FC950-9207-46C5-865D-178803EC29D8

Holotype: A preserved specimen in the Queensland Museum, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, Specimen number J85811 collected from Mount Glorious, near Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, Latitude -27.33 S., Longitude 152.77 E. This government-owned facility allows access to its holdings.

Paratypes: 1/ A preserved specimen in the Queensland Museum, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, Specimen number J76933 from Enoggera Reservoir, near Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, Latitude -27.45 S., Longitude 152.92 E.

2/ A preserved specimen in the Queensland Museum, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, Specimen number J2831 from Enoggera Reservior, near Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, Latitude -27.45 S., Longitude 152.92 E.

3/ A preserved specimen in the Queensland Museum, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, Specimen number J18603, collected from Oxley Creek, Acacia Ridge, (Brisbane), Latitude -27.58 S., Longitude 153.03 E.

Diagnosis: The species *Ophioscincus paulwoolfi sp. nov.* is similar in most respects to *Ophioscincus ophioscincus* (Boulenger, 1887) and would key as this species using the diagnostic information in Cogger (2014), in particular the key on page 668.

Ophioscincus paulwoolfi sp. nov. is readily separated from *O. ophioscincus* (Boulenger, 1887) by having a less blunt tail end (original tails). This is well rounded in *O. ophioscincus* versus somewhat pointed (but still blunt) in *O. paulwoolfi sp. nov.*.

O. paulwoolfi sp. nov. is further distinguished from *O. ophioscincus* by colouration in life.

This includes by having indistinct light markings on the upper surfaces of the flanks of the dark coloured tail, versus obvious yellow-spotting on purplish black in *O. ophioscincus.* The light yellowish brown upper surface of the head of *O. paulwoolfi sp.*

nov. is heavily laden with purple markings, especially between the eyes, versus no such markings in *O. ophioscincus.* The upper surface of the neck of *O. paulwoolfi sp. nov.* has large purplish black spots not seen in *O. ophioscincus.* The upper surface of the body of *O. paulwoolfi sp. nov.* has a series of well-defined purplish black spots forming four longitudinal lines down the back. In *O. ophioscincus* these spots are tiny, making the lines similarly indistinct.

Both *O. paulwoolfi sp. nov.* and *O. ophioscincus* are separated from all similar species of skink in eastern Australia by the following unique suite of characters: No limbs, short obtuse snout, very small eye, lower eyelid scaly. Two loreals. Nostril pierced in the anterior part of a large nasal; no supranasal; rostral protrudes between the nasals, forming a suture with the frontonasal, which forms a broad suture with the frontal; prefrontals very small and widely separated; frontal broader than long, forming a suture with the first supraciliary and with the first supraocular; three supraoculars, first largest; five supraciliaries; frontoparietals distinct, a little smaller than the interparietal; parietals forming a suture behind the interparietal; two pairs of nuchals; ear completely hidden. 20-24 smooth midbody scale rows; dorsals being largest. A pair of enlarged preanals. Tail thick, ending obtusely either in a rounded end (*O. ophioscincus*) or a blunt tip (*O. paulwoolfi sp. nov.*), the length of the tail being a little shorter than head and body. Colouration is beige on top; with flanks of body and tail blackish purple in colour. Venter is pinkish-yellow, with the latter half of the tail becoming dark in colour like the flanks. Back has closely placed spots or tiny flecks forming a series of four (usually) or more well-defined lines on the beige background. Adult snout vent length is usually about 75 mm and tail is about 65 mm.

A photo of an adult *O. paulwoolfi sp. nov.* in life is seen in Wilson and Swan (2017) page 383 middle right or Wilson and Knowles (1988), page 308, top left (image 602). A photo of an adult *O. ophioscincus* in life is in Cogger (2014) page 669, top left.

Habits: Both *O. ophioscincus* and *O. paulwoolfi sp. nov.* are known to have a habitat preference for rainforest and adjoining wet sclerophyll forest, where they are most commonly found sheltering under small rocks, logs and other available ground cover. They appear to be crepuscular as in most active at dusk and especially so in the warmer summer months. In mid-winter they appear to hibernate in the true sense of the word in that they hide inside logs or well-embedded rocks, often in the shade, indicating no desire for activity in the relevant season, from which they do not appear to emerge for some weeks or perhaps even months.

Distribution: *O. paulwoolfi sp. nov.* is found in the region bounded by Bundaberg in the north (it is absent from this specific locality) and the Brisbane River Valley in the south. It is a Queensland endemic species. *O. ophioscincus* is found north of Bundaberg in Queensland in suitable habitat to areas slightly north of Rockhampton in Queensland.

Conservation Status: No immediate risks are known as the species is common and found in numerous protected areas and reserves not likely to be destroyed in the near future. There is no known trade in the species, nor is any foreseeable.

Etymology: Named in honour of Paul Woolf, of Walloon, Queensland, Australia, for his services to herpetology in Australian spanning some decades, including as foundation president for the Herpetological Society of Queensland, Incorporated, who incidentally have taken a strong stance against the taxonomic vandalism of Wolfgang Wüster and his gang of thieves as detailed by Hoser (2007, 2009, 2012a-b, 2015, 2015a-f, 2019a-b) and sources cited therein.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST - None.