

A new subspecies of Green Python (Serpentes: Pythonidae: *Chondropython*) from eastern New Guinea.

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ABSTRACT

Until recently, all Green Pythons (Genus *Chondropython* Meyer, 1874) were treated by herpetologists as a single wide-ranging species, namely *C. viridis* (Schlegel, 1872). Hoser in 2003 formally named an Australian subspecies, *C. viridis shireenae* and Hoser (2009), formally described a second subspecies from Normanby Island, Papua New Guinea, called *C. viridis adelynhoserae*.

Hoser (2009) also resurrected from synonymy the species *Chondropython azureus* Meyer, 1874.

Natusch *et al.* (2020) resurrected *C. pulcher* Sauvage, 1878 from synonymy of *C. azureus*, as a subspecies and formally named another subspecies of *C. azureus*, *C. azureus utaraensis*.

This paper continues the division of *Chondropython* by formally naming as a subspecies of *C. viridis* the divergent population from near Popondetta, Papua New Guinea as *C. viridis jackyhoserae* subsp. nov..

Keywords: Herpetology; snake; python; green python; New Guinea; Indonesia; PNG; *Morelia*; *Chondropython*; *viridis*; *azureus*; *shireenae*; *pulcher*; *utaraensis*; *adelynhoserae*; new subspecies; *jackyhoserae*.

INTRODUCTION

The Green Pythons, genus *Chondropython*, Meyer, 1874 have been the subject of intensive study by myself, Raymond Hoser, for more than 40 years.

As mentioned in Hoser (2003) a full and comprehensive genus-wide revision was being undertaken.

When the revision was at its terminal phase and just about to be published, it was rudely erased by an illegal armed raid by government wildlife officers and police of our research facility on 17 August 2011.

In this violent home and business invasion, all research materials at our facility were taken. This included research files, museum specimen records, thousands of slides and photos, draft papers, disks, computers, mobile phones and all other relevant things.

In spite of court orders to return all stolen goods intact, this order was not complied with (Court of Appeal 2014, Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal 2015).

The unlawful raid was instigated by a gang of criminals known as the Wolfgang Wüster gang of thieves (see Hoser 1995a-f and 2019a-b for details) in order to maliciously disable our successful wildlife conservation business and to sabotage ongoing scientific research projects and publications.

The Wolfgang Wüster gang of thieves have also been at war against the rules of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* (Ride *et al.* 1999) for decades (see Hoser 2007).

Their more recent war cry manifesto known as "Kaiser *et al.* (2013)", although in fact written by Wolfgang Wüster (see Kaiser 2012a) as frequently amended (see also Kaiser 2012, 2012b,

2013, 2014a and 2014b) and the claims within it, have been discredited numerous times (e.g. Cogger (2014), Dubois (2014), Dubois *et al.* (2019), Eipper (2013), Hoser (2007, 2009, 2012a, 2012b, 2015a-f, 2016, 2019a-b), Mutton (2014a, 2014b), Shea (2013a-d), Thorpe (2013, 2014a, 2014b), Wellington (2013, 2014a, 2014b, 2016), Wells (2013, 2014) and sources cited therein).

Notwithstanding these setbacks the Wolfgang Wüster gang remain undeterred and continue to commit acts of internet trolling, running countless fake accounts online for peddling hatred and lies, as well as engaging in overt scientific fraud, property theft, assault, vandalism, money scams, money laundering, rapes, child sex offences, trafficking of amphetamines, animal abuse and cruelty, wildlife smuggling, shooting people (yes, two of the group have been convicted of this) and other serious crimes (Supreme Court of Western Australia 2009, Hobbs 2010, Goodman 2019).

Some members of the group have been charged and jailed for various crimes, including for example David John Williams, convicted and fined \$7,500 for animal cruelty and wildlife smuggling at the Cairns Magistrates Court, Damien Mark Harding jailed for child sex offences, Seth Pywell fined for his role in the shooting of two people, Matthew Gatt fined \$8,000 for the theft of a rare snake and Andrew Browne jailed for child sex offences, but the group ring leaders Wolfgang Wüster, Hinrich Kaiser, Mark O'Shea and Wulf Schleip have managed to avoid criminal sanctions to date.

Wolfgang Wüster and Mark O'Shea even post images of themselves committing crimes online, but have somehow managed to avoid criminal charges.

As of 2020, members of the Wolfgang Wüster gang of thieves had plagiarised works of other scientists and in breach of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* illegally renamed nearly 100 species and genera previously formally named by other ethical scientists.

Keeping count of their acts of taxonomic vandalism and theft is an extremely difficult task, but lists of these acts are regularly published!

The gang have then by use of countless false accounts and false identities, created a false veneer online that their illegal names are the correct names and that the earlier proper names should not be used.

Noting that the Wolfgang Wüster gang of thieves have already tried to rename numerous previously named taxa, people should be mindful of almost certain further acts of taxonomic vandalism by this gang of thieves in PRINO journals they control, including the PRINO Online *Zootaxa*, in terms of the new names erected in this paper.

PRINO is an acronym for "Peer reviewed in name only" which is the term best described for the online journals that that Wolfgang Wüster gang of thieves members publish their fraudulent papers in.

The journals such as the predatory PRINO journal "*Zootaxa*" have near zero respect for the principles of science, or ethics and significantly papers published in them are either not peer reviewed in any way, or alternatively the process is so shambolic as to be non-existent in any meaningful way. See also Oransky (2020).

While peer review is not a mandatory requirement of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature*, it is regarded as the gold standard in scientific publishing and is therefore generally expected in such publications.

With the preceding in mind and coupled with the fact that environmental destruction in New Guinea is ongoing at an accelerating pace, it is critically important that any unnamed forms of wildlife there be formally identified and named sooner, rather than later as per Hoser (2019a, 2019b).

The Green Pythons found on the north coast of Papua New Guinea, generally west of Cape Nelson and east of Lae are morphologically most similar to the taxon *C. viridis adelynhoserae* Hoser, 2019, but are sufficiently divergent to be given formal taxonomic recognition as a subspecies. Populations of each are also separated by a deep sea barrier which combined with molecular divergence indicated by Natusch *et al.* (2020) make a compelling case for the mainland taxon to be formally named as a new subspecies.

It was these well-known facts that led to the inquiry that formed the basis of this paper.

In passing I note that many authors and texts have in recent years placed Green Pythons in the genus *Morelia* Gray, 1842 (type species *M. variegata* Gray, 1842). However Rawlings *et al.* (2008) found a divergence of the two groups (*Morelia* and *Chondropython*) of more than 35 million years, making the case for two separate genera compelling!

Unfortunately, scientific reality is not a part of the Wolfgang Wüster gang of thieves repertoire, and because it was Hoser (2000) who removed *Chondropython* from the synonymy of *Morelia*, the Wolfgang Wüster gang of thieves has ever since tried to get everyone else to call Green Pythons *Morelia*! Hoser, who actually works with pythons (unlike the Wolfgang Wüster gang of thieves), split *Morelia* and *Chondropython* in 2000 based on clear morphological divergence. It was not unexpected that when Rawlings *et al.* (2008) used new molecular methods to measure timeline divergence that their results matched those of Hoser (2000).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

While these have been inferred already, I shall briefly state what they were.

Specimens of Green Pythons (Genus *Chondropython* Meyer, 1874) were inspected either live or dead over a period spanning

more than 40 years as was all relevant and available literature. This included all previous descriptions of taxa, including known synonyms as cited in previous papers of myself including Hoser (Hoser, 2000, 2003a, 2003b, 2004, 2009) and synonyms published in Cogger *et al.* (1983).

Of particular relevance to this review, were phylogenetic and morphological studies of reptiles that helped identify biogeographical barriers for species similarly eco-constrained as Green Pythons as well as geological studies that helped identify potential barriers to dispersion of populations.

Included in the audit were photos of specimens with good locality data and distribution maps from State Museums, based on specimens in their collections.

Where available and applicable, fossil specimens and records were also reviewed.

Past descriptions and synonymies were reviewed with a view to using available names for species groups if they had been properly proposed in the past but in the case of the relevant taxon subject of this paper, no names were available.

Publications relevant to the taxonomic and nomenclatural conclusions in terms of the genus *Chondropython sensu lato* including all descriptions of all known species or subspecies, including all known synonyms, and specifically relevant to the taxonomic decisions in terms of the newly named form include the following: Boulenger (1893), De Rooij (1915), Cogger *et al.* (1983), Hoser (2000, 2003, 2004, 2009), Meyer (1874), Natusch and Lyons (2014), Natusch *et al.* (2020), Rawlings and Donnellan (2003), Rawlings *et al.* (2008), Ride *et al.* (1999), Sauvage (1878), Schlegel (1872), Wells and Wellington (1985), and sources cited therein.

RESULTS

As already stated in the abstract, one hitherto unnamed form had been tentatively identified as an unnamed taxon.

This was confirmed after inspection of specimens and a review of the relevant literature.

Hence the Green Python from the Popondetta/Mount Victory area of south-east New Guinea on the northern coast is formally named as a new subspecies for the first time. This is done in accordance with the rules of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* (Ride *et al.* 1999).

INFORMATION RELEVANT TO THE FORMAL DESCRIPTION THAT FOLLOWS

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 over a period spanning more than 40 years.

All necessary government issued wildlife licenses, permits and authorities were obtained as needed.

In terms of the following formal description, 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).

Material downloaded from the internet and cited anywhere in this paper was downloaded and checked most recently as of 1 June 2020 (including if also viewed prior), unless otherwise stated and was accurate in terms of the content cited herein as of that date. Unless otherwise stated explicitly, colour and other descriptions apply to living adult specimens of generally good health and not under any form of stress by means such as excessive cool, heat, dehydration or 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 relevant species or subspecies has already been spelt out and/

or is done so within each formal description and does not rely on material within publications not explicitly cited herein.

CONSERVATION

In terms of conservation of this newly described taxon, the relevant comments in Hoser (1989, 1991, 1993, 1995b, 1996, 2019a and 2019b) apply. Wildlife laws as currently enforced in Papua New Guinea are not in a materially significant way enhancing the long-term survival prospects of this species.

Over breeding of humans and the environmental problems associated with this overpopulation are by far the greatest long term threat to the relevant species, noting that already liberated feral pest species continue to cause ongoing stress and decline of similar species as explicitly detailed in Hoser (1991).

CHONDROPYTHON VIRIDIS JACKYHOSERAE SUBSP. NOV.
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Holotype: A preserved specimen at the Australian Museum in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, specimen number R.9347, collected from Mount Lamington, Oro (formerly Northern District) Province, Papua New Guinea, Latitude -8.933 S., Longitude 148.166 E. This facility allows access to its holdings.

Paratype: A preserved specimen at the Australian Museum in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, specimen number R.9854, collected from Mount Lamington, Oro (formerly Northern District) Province, Papua New Guinea, Lat. -8.933 S., Long. 148.166 E.

Diagnosis: Natusch *et al.* (2020), separate all three subspecies of *Chondropython azureus* Meyer, 1874 from *C. viridis* (Schlegel, 1872) in their "Table 1" (they erroneously place all species within the putative genus *Morelia* Gray, 1842; see explanation elsewhere in this paper).

In summary *C. viridis* of all subspecies are separated from all forms of *C. azureus* by the following suite of characters: Dark green versus light green dorsal colouration in adults and white scales running down the vertebral line, either broken or unbroken and of varying size in different specimens and locales, versus no such white scales in *C. azureus*.

The newly named subspecies *C. viridis jackyhoserae* sp. nov. is separated from each of the other subspecies as follows: *C. viridis viridis* (type form from Aru Islands and also including southern New Guinea) and *C. shireenae* Hoser, 2003 are separated from *C. viridis adelynhoserae* Hoser, 2009 and *C. viridis jackyhoserae* sp. nov. by the longer tail and higher subcaudal count (under 85, versus over 85).

C. viridis shireenae Hoser, 2003 is separated from all other subspecies by having an obviously blunted snout and therefore a shorter head.

C. viridis viridis and *C. viridis jackyhoserae* sp. nov. has a slightly pointed snout and therefore appears to have a more triangular-shaped head, but otherwise is similar in most respects to *C. viridis shireenae*. Those two subspecies are separated from one another by tail length (see above).

By contrast *C. viridis adelynhoserae* is separated from both of *C. viridis viridis* and *C. viridis jackyhoserae* sp. nov. by having a distinctively bulbous rear of the head (posterior to the eyes) and a box-shaped (suarish) snout region, somewhat similar to that in *C. azureus* Meyer, 1874.

Both *C. viridis adelynhoserae* and *C. viridis jackyhoserae* sp. nov. are separated from all other *Chondropython* in New Guinea and Australia by its adult dorsal pattern of (smallish) white blotches that in the main do not cover the spinal ridge, as seen in all other Australian and other southern PNG *Chondropython*.

Adult *C. viridis adelynhoserae* have a substantial amount of blue on the dorsum versus limited amounts on *C. viridis jackyhoserae* sp. nov..

Sometimes *Chondropython viridis* from elsewhere will have similar blotches, but invariably, these snakes either also have a mid-dorsal line or dots (not seen in *C. viridis adelynhoserae* or *C. viridis jackyhoserae* sp. nov.), or the blotches run well over the spinal (mid dorsal) mid-line.

MtDNA for the holotype of *C. viridis adelynhoserae* was examined by Rawlings and Donellan 2003 and compared with other *Chondropython* yielding traits broadly in line with *C. viridis viridis* (but a three per cent sequence divergence) (see p. 41 their paper).

The results of Natusch *et al.* (2020) indicates that *C. viridis jackyhoserae* sp. nov. is similarly divergent from other *C. viridis*. Without strict calibration, the cited divergence would normally be estimated at 1.5 MYA for each form, which could easily be defined as full species-level divergence.

Distribution: The taxon *C. viridis jackyhoserae* subsp. nov. is currently restricted to the Oro (Northern Province) area of Papua New Guinea (PNG) near Popondetta, with a potential maximum range of roughly from west of Cape Nelson and east of Lae, PNG and north of the central cordillera.

Etymology: *C. viridis jackyhoserae* subsp. nov. is named in honour of my youngest daughter Jacky Hoser, of Park Orchards, Victoria, Australia, in recognition of more than 18 years working with reptiles and other wildlife and their long-term conservation.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

None.