

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

NUCRAS TAENIOLATA Smith, 1838 (Striped Sandveld Lizard) (SAURIA, LACERTIDAE): ADDITIONAL RECORDS. On 4 August 2008 an adult female *Nucras taeniolata* was found sheltering under a thin slab of concrete on a disused bridge across a tributary of the Coega River, Amanzi Estate, 25 Km north of Port Elizabeth, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa (33° 42' 04.5" S, 25° 31' 01.9" E; 3325 DA; 83 m asl.). The predominant vegetation type in the region was Sundays Doringveld Thicket which is categorised as Endangered due to extensive clearance and degradation for agricultural developments. The collecting site was extensively shaded by alien vegetation including eucalyptus trees and sedge.

The specimen was deposited in the Port Elizabeth Museum herpetological collection (PEM R17628). It measured 61 + 134 mm (SVL + tail). Typical marking and colour is shown in Fig. 1a/b.

Broadley (1972) last revised the *Nucras tessellata* group, recognizing four species (some with races), i.e., *N. taeniolata* (2 races), *N. tessellata* (2 races), and the monotypic *Nucras intertexta* and *Nucras caesicaudata*. Subsequent amendments have raised *Nucras tessellata livida* (Branch & Bauer, 1987) and *Nucras taeniolata ornata* (Jacobsen, 1989) to specific status, and revived *Nucras holubi* from the synonymy of the latter (Jacobsen, 1989). *N. taeniolata*, now monotypic, was separated by over 250 Km from the northern *N. t. ornata* and has the most restricted range of any Sandveld Lizard. It was known to Broadley (1972) from only 18 specimens and two quarter-degree squares (the traditional mapping unit in southern Africa). The majority of specimens (13) available to Broadley (1972) were from Grahamstown, to which he restricted the type locality. They formed part of the Albany Museum collection that was subsequently incorporated into the Port Elizabeth Museum collection.

Subsequent published records include four specimens from the Addo Elephant National Park (AENP) (Branch & Braack, 1987), and two specimens from the Great Fish River Reserve complex and an adjacent commercial farm (Fabricius et al., 2003).

Only a few specimens have been collected in the last 25 years, and this additional material is

summarized as follows; PEM R9366 (CDENC 11281), Andries Vosloo Kudu Reserve, Albany District, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa (3326 BB, 33° 07' 00" S, 26° 45' 00" E), 17 Nov. 1983, W. Berrington; PEM R9365 (CDENC 11280), Andries Vosloo Kudu Reserve, Albany District, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa (3326 BA, 33° 08' 00" S, 26° 43' 00" E), 15 Jan. 1980, C. Wels; PEM R10135 (CDNEC 1213), Farm Handsworth, Albany District, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa (3326 AD, 33° 21' 03" S, 26° 20' 50" E), 21 Oct 1973, J. C. Greig;

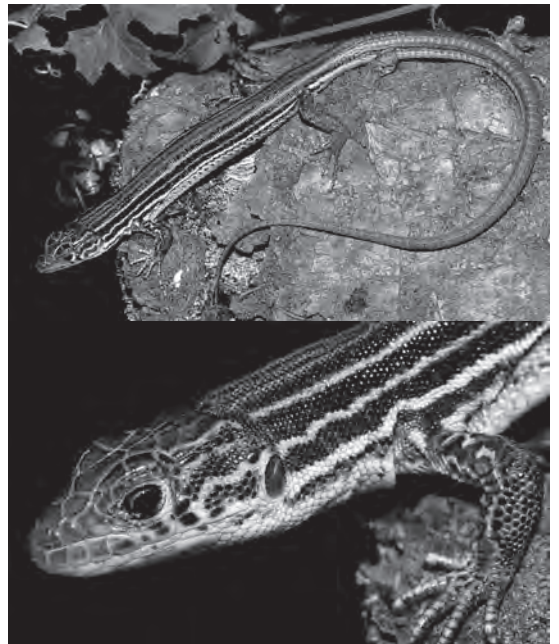


Figure 1 a/b. *Nucras taeniolata*, Amanzi Estate (PEM R17628. Photograph by W. R. Branch)

PEM R5070 (CDNEC 10174), Thomas Baines Nature Reserve, Albany District, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa (3326 AD, 33° 23' 44" S, 26° 28' 44" E), 09 March 1990, M. Burger; PEM R5075 (CDNEC 10173), same locality and collector, 2 March 1990; PEM R13767 (CDNEC 11049), Double Drift Game Reserve, Albany District, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa (3226 DD, 32° 57' 30" S, 26° 48' 25" E), 29 Aug. 1993, M. Burger; PEM R8226 (CDNEC 10648), Groendal Conservation Area, on trail from offices to Blindekloof, Uitenhage District, Eastern Cape

Province, South Africa (3325 CB, 33° 42' 38" S, 25° 18' 32" E), 26 Sept. 1992, M. Burger; PEM R3432, 3466, Addo Elephant National Park, Kirkwood District, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa (3325 BC), 2 Oct. 1981, W. R. Branch; PEM R4875-76, Addo Elephant Park, Zuurkop, (3325 BC), W. R. Branch.

The Amanzi specimen, along with the unpublished record from Groendal, extend the known range approximately 100 Km west of the Albany records. They occur 25-30 Km from records from the AENP, and west of the intervening Sunday's River valley. Currently the species is restricted to two populations within the Algoa Bay region of the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. The typical population, centred around the restricted type locality (Broadley, 1972), occurs in the Albany region (Thomas Baines Nature Reserve, north through Grahamstown to the Great Fish River Reserve complex), whilst the other population (Groendal to AENP) occurs in the western Algoa Bay hinterland. However, the species is terrestrial and secretive and easily overlooked within the dense mesic succulent thicket from which most records are known. Additional specimens from the intervening area may be discovered with more detailed surveys.

The species remains rare in collections (only 33 specimens are known) and, together with *Bitis albanica*, *Cordylus tasmani*, *Acontias orientalis*, *Scelotes anguineus*, and *Bradypodion taeniabronchum*, is endemic to the Algoa Bay region and forms a minor centre of endemism in the Eastern Cape.

REFERENCES

- Branch, W. R. & Bauer, A. M. (1995). Herpetofauna of the Little Karoo, Western Cape, South Africa with notes on life history and taxonomy. *Herpetol. Nat. Hist.* **3**, 1, 47-90.
- Branch, W. R. & Braack, H. (1987). The reptiles and amphibians of the Addo Elephant National Park. *Koedoe* **30**, 61-112.
- Broadley, D.G. (1972). A review of the *Nucras tessellata* group (Sauria: Lacertidae). *Arnoldia Rhod.* **5**, 20, 1-36.
- Fabricius, C., Burger, M. & Hockey, P.A.R. (2003). Comparing biodiversity between protected areas and adjacent rangeland in xeric succulent thicket, South Africa. *J. App. Ecol.* **40**, 392-403.
- Jacobsen, N.H.G. (1989). A herpetological survey of the Transvaal. Unpublished M.Sc. thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. South Africa.

Submitted by: WILLIAM R. BRANCH¹ and M. BURGER²

¹ Department of Herpetology, Bayworld (Port Elizabeth Museum), P.O. Box 13147, Humewood 6013, South Africa. wrbranch@bayworld.co.za

² Animal Demography Unit, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa.



OREOCRYPTOPHIS PORPHYRACEUS

COXI (Thai Bamboo Ratsnake). PATTERN ABNORMALITY. *Oreocryptophis porphyraceus* (= *Elaphe porphyracea*) is a snake species characterized by a highly variable colour pattern which plays a key role in its sub-specific taxonomy. There are two subspecies groups differentiated by their distinctly different pattern. The *O. porphyraceus*-group has dark stripes restricted to the posterior part of the body, or alternatively stripes are completely absent, while the *O. nigrofasciatus*-group has stripes covering the entire body (Schulz & Helfenberger, 1998). The subspecies *Oreocryptophis porphyraceus coxi*, which is assigned to the *O. nigrofasciatus*-group, is diagnosed by the possession of stripes which are up to 2 dorsals wide. These stripes may be accompanied by 1 or 2 dark blotches on the anterior part of the body.

On 5 August 2006, a juvenile female with aberrant pattern hatched from a clutch of 4 eggs laid by a *O. p. coxi* F2 captive-bred female (origin: Thailand, Loei province) after incubation on wet vermiculite at 27-28°C. This juvenile had no dark blotches and stripes were absent on the anterior third of the body. Although two dark dorsolateral stripes were slightly visible on the middle part of the body, they were normally developed on the posterior part of the body and on the tail. The head