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A new blind snake (Typhlopidae) from Northeastern Cuba

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Abstract

Typhlops leptolepis **sp. nov.** is a new blind snake from Holguín Province, northeastern region of Cuba. The new species is characterized by its small and thin body size, as well as a narrow rostral in dorsal view, longer than broad, with parallel to curved sides, tapering toward anterior tip. The preocular is in contact with third supralabial only. It has 20 anterior scale rows reducing to 18 posteriorly at around midbody or posterior to midbody, moderate to high middorsal scale counts (250–308), and a peculiar coloration (head, neck, and tail whitish spotted in ventral view). Based on its morphology, the new species can be placed within the *Typhlops lumbricalis* species group and a key to the species belonging to this group is presented.

Key words: Scolecophidia, Typhlopidae, *Typhlops lumbricalis* species group, Cuba, West Indies

Introduction

Typhlops Oppel, 1811, is the largest genus within Typhlopidae (Scolecophidia) with more than 122 recognized species (Uetz *et al.*, 2012). The genus is distributed worldwide (Africa, Australia and Oceania, Southeastern Europe, Southern Asia, Central and South America, and West Indies), although almost all species occur in tropical and subtropical areas (Uetz *et al.*, 2012). The genus contains 43 endemic species from West Indies that are morphologically arranged in several species groups, two of these occurring in Cuba: *Typhlops biminiensis* and *Typhlops lumbricalis* species groups. The *Typhlops lumbricalis* species group also occurs in Bahamas and Hispaniola, and includes six species until date: *T. lumbricalis* (Linnaeus, 1758); *Typhlops oxyrhinus* Domínguez and Díaz, 2011a; *Typhlops pachyrhinus* Domínguez and Díaz, 2011a; *Typhlops schwartzi* Thomas, 1989; *Typhlops tetrathyreus* Thomas, 1989; and *Typhlops titanops* Thomas, 1989.

For many years, *Typhlops lumbricalis* was consistently considered to have a wide distribution in the Bahaman and Cuban Archipelagos (e.g., Thomas, 1989; Schwartz and Henderson, 1991; Domínguez and Moreno, 2003; Thomas and Hedges, 2007; Henderson and Powell, 2009). However, a thorough revision of *T. lumbricalis* resulted in redescription of the name and its restriction to the Bahamas Islands, as well as in the description of two new Cuban blind snakes species (Domínguez and Díaz, 2011a, b).

Recently, substantial new collections of *Typhlops* specimens from northeastern region of Cuba were deposited in three institutions, Instituto de Ecología y Sistemática (IES, Cuba), Centro Oriental de Ecosistemas y Biodiversidad (BIOECO, Cuba), and Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales (MNCN, Spain). The new specimens are associated with the *T. lumbricalis* species group based on their morphology, and clearly represent a new taxon. Thus in this paper a new blind snake species is described from the Cuba Island.