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A new species of *Sphenomorphus* Fitzinger, 1843 (Squamata: Sauria: Scincidae) from Vietnam

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Abstract

A new forest skink species of the genus *Sphenomorphus* is described from Kon Tum Plateau, southern Central Vietnam. *Sphenomorphus sheai* sp. nov. is similar to the other montane skink species from the Indochina region, *Lygosoma veunsaensis*, *Scincella apraefrontalis*, *Sphenomorphus tetradactylus*, and *Sphenomorphus tridigitus*, in having a small size and the absence of external ear openings. However, the new species is differentiated from aforementioned species and other members of *Sphenomorphus* from China and mainland Southeast Asia by a unique suite of morphological characters. The discovery of *S. sheai* brings the total species number of *Sphenomorphus* known from Vietnam to twelve.

Key words: Kon Tum Plateau, skink, *Sphenomorphus*, taxonomy

Introduction

The genus *Sphenomorphus* Fitzinger, 1843 is one of the most diverse groups of lizards with more than 120 currently known species worldwide (Nguyen *et al.* 2011; Roy *et al.* 2013; Uetz 2013). Recent work of Linkem *et al.* (2011) demonstrated that *Sphenomorphus* is highly paraphyletic. These authors subsequently transferred the New World species, formerly assigned to the genus, to *Scincella* and removed 29 Asian species from *Sphenomorphus* to other genera, viz. *Insulasaurus*, *Otosaurus*, *Parvosincus*, *Pinosincus*, and *Tytthoscincus* (see Linkem *et al.* 2011). In their review of the genus *Sphenomorphus* in Vietnam, Nguyen *et al.* (2011) recognized eleven species, including the newly described *S. tonkinensis* Nguyen, Schmitz, Nguyen, Orlov, Böhme & Ziegler, 2011 and *S. mimicus* Taylor, 1962, a species newly recorded for the country. In addition, Nguyen *et al.* (2012) reported the Taiwan Skink, *Sphenomorphus incognitus* (Thompson, 1912), from Vietnam for the first time. These discoveries clearly underline the imperfectly studied herpetofauna of Vietnam, in particular the lizard communities in remote areas. During recent field work in the montane forest of Kon Tum Plateau, southern Central Vietnam, we collected a remarkable small skink that was assigned to the genus *Sphenomorphus* based on the following morphological characters: prefrontals present, parietals in contact behind interparietal, supranasals absent, lower eyelid scaly, dorsal scales smooth, medial pair of preloacals enlarged, the inner preloacals overlapping the outer ones, hindlimbs with five digits, scales on dorsal surface of fourth toe in two or more rows over at least half of digit (Taylor 1963; Greer 1979, 1990; Shea & Greer 2002; Greer *et al.* 2006; Grismer 2008; Nguyen *et al.* 2011). Closer examination of this specimen revealed it to be an unnamed *Sphenomorphus* and we herein describe it as a new species.

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Appendix . Comparative specimens examined

- Sphenomorphus stellatus*. VIETNAM: Kon Tum: Kon Plong: Xa Hieu: IEBR FN. 39481; Gia Lai: An Khe (now K'Bang): Tram Lap: ROM 30567–30568.
- Sphenomorphus tridigitus*. VIETNAM: Quang Nam: Tra My: Ngoc Linh Mountain: IEBR 73–74.
- Sphenomorphus tetradactylus*. VIETNAM: Quang Binh: Phong Nha – Ke Bang: ZISP 23259 (holotype), IEBR A.2013.15.