

ZOOTAXA

1408

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Magnolia Press
Auckland, New Zealand

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(*Zootaxa* 1408)

78 pp.; 30 cm.

15 February 2007

ISBN 978-1-86977-074-7 (paperback)

ISBN 978-1-86977-075-4 (Online edition)

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 2007 BY

Magnolia Press

P.O. Box 41-383

Auckland 1346

New Zealand

e-mail: zootaxa@mapress.com

<http://www.mapress.com/zootaxa/>

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ISSN 1175-5326 (Print edition)

ISSN 1175-5334 (Online edition)



A revision of the genus *Leptotyphlops* in northeastern Africa and southwestern Arabia (Serpentes: Leptotyphlopidae)

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Abstract

The species of *Leptotyphlops* in northeastern Africa and southwestern Arabia (i.e. between 18°N and 12°S and between 29°E and 52°E) are revised. Twenty-five species belonging to five species groups are recognised, the taxonomy being based largely on skull morphology and visceral anatomy. Seven new species (*L. ionidesi*, *L. tanae*, *L. howelli*, *L. mbanjensis*, *L. keniensis*, *L. aethiopicus* and *L. nigroterminus*) and one new subspecies (*L. scutifrons pitmani*) are described. Wallach & Lanza (2004) have revived *Leptotyphlops braccianii* (Scortecchi) from the synonymy of *L. macrorhynchus* (Jan & Sordelli), with *Glauconia variabilis* Scortecchi regarded as a synonym. They also revived *L. erythraeus* (Scortecchi) from the synonymy of *L. macrorhynchus* and *L. yemenicus* Scortecchi from the synonymy of *L. nursii*. *Leptotyphlops monticolus* (Chabanaud) is now revived from the synonymy of *L. emini* (Boulenger). *Glauconia latirostris* Sternfeld is reinstated as a full species. *Leptotyphlops nursii* (Boulenger), long known from the Arabian peninsula, is recorded from higher altitudes in northern Somalia. Descriptions of the visceral anatomy are presented for all species found in eastern and southern Africa. A key based on external characters is provided, the known variation in meristic and visceral characters is tabulated and the distributions mapped.

Key words: *Leptotyphlops*, taxonomy, skull morphology, visceral anatomy, zoogeography, Africa, Arabia

Introduction

Boulenger (1915b) included seven species of *Glauconia* Gray 1845 [a junior synonym of *Leptotyphlops* Fitzinger 1843] in his East African check list: *L. distanti* (Nyassaland only), *L. merkeri*, *L. emini*, *L. boulengeri*, *L. longicauda*, *L. conjuncta* and *Glauconia braueri* (a synonym of *Ramphotyphlops braminus* [=Typhlopidae]). Boulenger's (1915c) check list for North-East Africa, including Socotra, again comprised seven species: *L. macrorhynchus*, *L. filiformis*, *L. macrura*, *L. emini*, *L. reticulata*, *L. cairi* and *L. dissimilis*.

Parker (1949) listed five nominal species from Somalia, three from Eritrea and two endemic to Socotra Island, and noted that the number of specimens available was so small that it was not profitable to attempt any serious survey of them. Loveridge (1957b), in his East African check list, included *Leptotyphlops c. conjuncta* (with *Glauconia merkeri* as a synonym), *L. boulengeri*, *L. e. emini*, *L. e. pembae*, *L. longicauda* and *L. fiechteri*.

Broadley & Watson (1976) revised the southern African species of *Leptotyphlops*, but included Tanzania south of Latitude 8°S and made some taxonomic changes affecting East Africa. *Leptotyphlops emini* was placed in the synonymy of *L. nigricans*, with *L. pembae* retained as a subspecies of it, and *Glauconia merkeri* was revived as a subspecies of *L. scutifrons*.

The worm snakes of the northern parts of this region were reviewed by Hahn (1978) and assigned to three species groups (all with a discrete frontal shield): the *Leptotyphlops longicaudus* group with a rounded snout and 10 scale rows on the tail, the *L. macrorhynchus* group with a beaked snout and 10 tail rows and the *L. blanfordii* group with a rounded snout and 12 tail rows. The first two groups were represented on Socotra Island, the *L. longicaudus* group by a new species, *L. wilsoni*.

Largen and Rasmussen (1993) listed *Leptotyphlops cairi*, *L. macrorhynchus* and *L. nigricans* for Ethiopia