



The shocking pink dragon millipede, *Desmoxytes purpurosea*, a colourful new species from Thailand (Diplopoda: Polydesmida: Paradoxosomatidae)

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Abstract

A shocking pink, very spiny new species of “dragon millipede”, *Desmoxytes purpurosea* **sp.n.**, is described from Thailand, Uthaitani province. Its behaviour suggests that its colouration is aposematic, like that of some bright red congeners. Relations of the new species to congeners are discussed.

Key words: taxonomy, aposematic, Uthaitani province

Introduction

The striking, spiny “dragon millipedes” of the genus *Desmoxytes* are known from a large area in South East Asia, from south-eastern China south through Vietnam, Thailand and Myanmar. Twenty-three species are known from this area. One of these, *D. planata* (Pocock, 1895) occurs not only in Southeast Asia but has also been recorded from Sri Lanka, the Andaman, Seychelles and Fiji islands and has further been encountered in quarantine in soil around plants from Java and Sri Lanka (Shelley & Lehtinen 1998, Shelley *et al.* 1998).

The genus was revised by Golovatch & Enghoff (1994), and Nguyen Duc Anh *et al.* (2005) described further new species from Vietnam. Mesibov (2006) described the similar genus *Desmoxytoides* from Australia and emphasized that the circumscription of *Desmoxytes* remains questionable. For the time being, we adhere to the somewhat loose generic diagnosis given by Golovatch & Enghoff (1994). Apart from *D. planata* which beyond doubt owes its large distribution to anthropochore dispersal, all known species of *Desmoxytes* are known from only one or at most a few localities. The described species of “dragon millipedes” are listed in Table 1.

The species described in the present paper is remarkable for its striking, shocking pink colouration. At 3 cm in length, it is also among the largest species in its genus. At the type locality, many specimens were seen sitting openly on the ground and vegetation during daytime. The stark bright colour no doubt is aposematic, warning would-be predators of a spiny, toxic animal. Millipedes of the order Polydesmida produce hydrogen cyanide in their defensive glands (Eisner *et al.* 1978), and living specimens of the new species gave off the typical almondlike smell associated with cyanide production. We think that such an unusually coloured, conspicuous millipede deserves more than a Latin name and suggest calling it “The shocking pink dragon millipede” (in Thai: Mangkorn Chomphoo).

The new species was collected from a unique ecosystem. Hup Pa Tard is a Permian limestone cavern cov-