



Systematic status and correct nomen of the western North African cat snake: *Telescopus tripolitanus* (Werner, 1909) (Serpentes: Colubridae), with comments on the other taxa in the *dhara-obtusus* group

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Abstract

The systematics and nomenclature of the genus *Telescopus* in north Africa (the *dhara* – *obtusus* – *tripolitanus* group) have been revised based on examination of the original descriptions and type specimens (when still extant) of all proposed nomina and of more than 100 specimens. Using colour and lepidosis characters, the following taxonomic decisions are proposed: 1. *Telescopus tripolitanus* (Werner, 1909) is considered a valid species. 2. *Tarbophis guidimakaensis* Chabanaud, 1916 is a junior subjective synonym of *T. tripolitanus*. 3. *Pseudotarbophis gabesi* Domergue, 1955 is a junior subjective synonym of *T. tripolitanus*. 4. “*Pseudotarbophis gabesiensis*” Domergue, 1959 is an incorrect subsequent spelling and is thus not an available nomen. 5. *Telescopus dhara dhara* (Forsskål, 1775), *Telescopus dhara obtusus* (Reuss, 1834) and *Telescopus dhara somalicus* (Parker, 1949) are valid, clearly diagnosable, allopatric taxa that we provisionally maintain at subspecific rank. 6. *Tarbophis guentheri*, Anderson, 1895 is a junior subjective synonym of *T. dhara dhara*. 7. *Telescopus gezirae* Broadley 1994 is maintained as a valid species.

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Introduction

The systematics and nomenclature of the north African cat snakes of the genus *Telescopus* are still extremely confused. Most authors agree that *obtusus* (Reuss, 1834) (terra typica: Egypt, see below) is the valid nomen for the eastern populations of north African *Telescopus*, but this taxon is variously treated as a distinct species, *T. obtusus*, by e. g. Böhme *et al.* (1989), Broadley (1994) or Joger and Lambert (1996) or as a subspecies of *T. dhara* (Forsskål, 1775) (terra typica: Yemen, see below) by Kramer and Schnurrenberger (1963), Bons and Geniez (1996) or Baha El Din (2006). The second source of disagreement among authors is the number of species in north Africa: either all populations have been included in *obtusus* (e. g. Böhme *et al.* 1989; Broadley 1994; Bons and Geniez 1996; Joger and Lambert 1996) or the western African populations have been sep-