



First record of the genus *Aristelliger* (Squamata: Sphaerodactylidae) in Cuba, with the description of a new species

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Abstract

The genus *Aristelliger* comprises seven species of which six inhabit the West Indies, and one occurs in Central America and satellite islands. For the first time, the genus is reported from Cuba, and a new species (*Aristelliger reyesi* sp. n.) is described from that island. The new taxon has affinities with the smaller species of the genus (subgenus *Aristelligella*): *A. expectatus*, *A. cochranae*, and *A. barbouri*. It differs from them in color pattern and other morphological characters.

Key words: Reptiles, *Aristelligella*, West Indies, Península de Hicacos, Varadero

Introduction

The genus *Aristelliger* has seven species, of which only one (*A. georgeensis* Bocourt) occurs in Central America and satellite islands. Two species (*A. expectatus* Cochran, and *A. lar* Cope), inhabit Hispaniola; one species occurs on Navassa Island (*A. cochranae* Grant); two species (*A. barbouri* Noble and Klingel, and *A. hechti* Schwartz and Crombie) are found in the Bahamas; and one species (*A. praesignis* Barbour) occurs in Jamaica, surrounding cays, Cayman Islands, and Swan Islands (Schwartz and Henderson, 1991; Bauer and Russell, 1993a-f; Lynxwiler and Parmelee, 1993). Additional species are in the process of being described (S. B. Hedges, in prep.). The genus has not previously been recorded from Cuba.

The following combination of characters (among others) are present in *Aristelliger*: 1) small granular scales on most of the body surface; 2) fragile skin; 3) a supraciliar scale modified as a tiny spine; 4) all digits clawed; 5) subdigital lamellae undivided; 6) “friction pads” (*sensu* Cochran, 1933) on three fingers and two outer toes, or only in one digit of each extremity, depending on the species group (see below); 7) eyes with vertical pupil; 8) one egg per clutch; 9) presence of hemipenial bones (Kluge, 1982); 10) presence of parafrenal bones (Bauer and Russell, 1989; Gamble *et al.*, 2008); and 11) croaking calls. Gamble *et al.* (2008) found strong support for a close relationship between *Aristelliger* and the North African genus *Quedenfeldtia*, and suggested its inclusion in the family Sphaerodactylidae.

There are two recognized groups of species, defined as subgenera by Hecht (1952). The smaller species: *A. cochranae*, *A. barbouri*, and *A. expectatus* (subgenus *Aristelligella*), are 46–63 mm SVL, have lateral postmentals in contact with the median line of mental scale, and friction pads on three fingers and two outer toes. A second group contains the larger members: *A. georgeensis*, *A. hechti*, *A. lar*, and *A. praesignis* (subgenus *Aristelliger*). They are 83–135 mm SVL and have 1–3 median postmentals and friction pads on one finger and one toe (Schwartz and Henderson, 1991).

On 30 May 2007 the senior author identified some reptiles photographed by Ernesto Reyes at the Nature Preserve of Varahicacos, Península de Hicacos, Western Cuba. Surprisingly, some of his photos depicted what, undoubtedly, was a gecko of the genus *Aristelliger*. Soon thereafter several specimens were collected at