



Zootaxa 2255: 1–100 (2009)
www.mapress.com/zootaxa/

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Monograph

ISSN 1175-5326 (print edition)

ZOOTAXA

ISSN 1175-5334 (online edition)

ZOOTAXA

2255

**A review of the eastern and southern African blind-snakes (Serpentes: Typhlopidae),
excluding *Letheobia* Cope, with the description of two new genera and a new species**

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Magnolia Press
Auckland, New Zealand

Accepted by D. Gower: 10 Sept. 2009; published: 8 Oct. 2009

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(*Zootaxa* 2255)

100 pp.; 30 cm.

8 Oct. 2009

ISBN 978-1-86977-419-6 (paperback)

ISBN 978-1-86977-420-2 (Online edition)

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 2009 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)

Table of contents

Abstract	4
Introduction	4
Materials and methods	6
Character analysis	7
Results	21
Systematic account	22
<i>Typhlops</i> Oppel, 1811	22
<i>Typhlops cuneirostris</i> Peters	23
<i>Typhlops calabresii</i> Gans & Laurent comb. nov.	25
<i>Typhlops platyrhynchus</i> Sternfeld	25
Afrotyphlops gen. nov.	26
<i>Afrotyphlops fornasinii</i> (Peters)	27
<i>Afrotyphlops angolensis</i> (Bocage)	29
<i>Afrotyphlops kaimosae</i> (Loveridge)	32
<i>Afrotyphlops nanus</i> sp. nov.	32
<i>Afrotyphlops blanfordii</i> (Boulenger)	34
<i>Afrotyphlops steinhausi</i> (Werner)	34
<i>Afrotyphlops bibronii</i> (A. Smith)	35
<i>Afrotyphlops rondoensis</i> (Loveridge)	36
<i>Afrotyphlops gierrai</i> (Mocquard)	38
<i>Afrotyphlops nigrocandidus</i> (Broadley & Wallach)	38
<i>Afrotyphlops lineolatus</i> (Jan)	39
<i>Afrotyphlops usambaricus</i> (Laurent)	41
<i>Afrotyphlops schmidti</i> (Laurent)	43
<i>Afrotyphlops tanganicanus</i> (Laurent)	44
<i>Afrotyphlops punctatus</i> (Leach)	44
<i>Afrotyphlops congestus</i> (Duméril & Bibron)	46
Megatyphlops gen. nov.	47
<i>Megatyphlops anomalus</i> (Bocage)	48
<i>Megatyphlops schlegelii</i> (Bianconi)	48
<i>Megatyphlops mucruso</i> (Peters) comb. nov.	52
<i>Megatyphlops brevis</i> (Scortecci) comb. nov.	56
<i>Rhinotyphlops</i> Fitzinger, 1843	57
<i>Rhinotyphlops boylei</i> Fitzinger	59
<i>Rhinotyphlops lalandei</i> (Schlegel)	59
<i>Rhinotyphlops schinzi</i> (Boettger)	61
<i>Ramphotyphlops</i> Fitzinger, 1843	62
<i>Ramphotyphlops braminus</i> (Daudin)	63
<i>Letheobia</i> Cope, 1869	65
Distribution and Keys	66
Key to the genera of Typhlopidae in eastern and southern Africa	76
Key to the species of <i>Typhlops</i> in eastern Africa	76
Key to the species of <i>Afrotyphlops</i> in eastern and southern Africa	76
Key to the species of <i>Megatyphlops</i> in eastern and southern Africa	77
Key to the species of <i>Rhinotyphlops</i> in eastern and southern Africa	78
Acknowledgments	78
Material examined for visceral data	78
Literature cited	79

Abstract

All eastern and southern African species of Typhlopidae (excluding *Letheobia*) are reviewed with synonymies, diagnoses, and distribution maps. The 27 species from this region are arranged as follows: three species remain in *Typhlops* (with *T. cuneirostris calabresii* elevated to full species status), 16 species are transferred from *Typhlops* to a new genus endemic to Africa (including a new species described from Kenya), three species remain in *Rhinotyphlops*, four species are transferred from *Rhinotyphlops* to a new genus endemic to Africa (with *R. schlegelii brevis* and *R. s. mucruso* elevated to full species status), and one invasive species of *Ramphotyphlops* is included, which has been established in a few areas. Keys to the included species and all six African typhlopidae genera are provided. A current taxonomic synopsis is provided for extralimital African and Southwest Asian typhlopidae species.

Key words: Typhlopidae, *Typhlops*, *Afrotyphlops*, *Megatyphlops*, *Rhinotyphlops*, *Ramphotyphlops*, taxonomy, distribution, visceral anatomy, eastern and southern Africa

Introduction

This group of blind-snakes has been subjected to many taxonomic vicissitudes during the past fifty years. The *Typhlops punctatus* group was revised by Laurent (1964b). He had earlier (Laurent, 1956a) revived *T. congestus* from the synonymy of *T. punctatus*. He recognised *T. boulengeri* Bocage in East Africa and described a montane subspecies *T. b. usambaricus*. *Typhlops gierrai* and *T. rondoensis* were recognised as full species, while *T. schmidti*, described by Laurent from the Shaba Province of Congo-Kinshasa in 1956, was represented by a new subspecies *tanganicanus* in southeast Tanzania.

The African Typhlopidae were revised by Roux-Estève (1974, 1975a) and she revived the genus *Rhinotyphlops* Fitzinger. In her residual genus *Typhlops*, she placed *T. lestradei* and *T. kaimosae* in the synonymy of *T. angolensis*, while *T. blanfordii*, *T. b. boulengeri*, *T. b. usambaricus* and *T. schmidti* were placed in the synonymy of *T. l. lineolatus*, with *T. l. tanganicanus* recognised as a subspecies. *Typhlops congestus* was treated as a forest subspecies of *T. punctatus*. These changes were incorporated into the revised *Guide to the Snakes of Uganda* (Pitman, 1974) on the advice of J. Guibé. This arrangement of genera was also followed by Hahn (1980) and McDiarmid *et al.* (1999) with the exception of "*Typhlops*" *braminus*, which was assigned to *Typhlina* by Hahn (1980), following McDowell (1974), and to *Ramphotyphlops* by McDiarmid *et al.* (1999).

Largen (1978) reviewed the Ethiopian Typhlopidae and showed that Roux-Estève's solitary record of *Typhlops p. punctatus* from that country was based on a *T. l. lineolatus*, while specimens from higher altitudes in the north seemed to support the recognition of *T. blanfordii* as a distinct taxon at least at the subspecific level.

Spawls (1978), in his Kenya snake checklist, accepted the classification of Roux-Estève, recorded *Typhlops p. punctatus* from four localities and added *T. cuneirostris* to the Kenyan list on the basis of specimens in the CAS. Broadley & Howell (1991), in their Tanzanian reptile checklist, followed Roux-Estève, but did not recognise *Rhinotyphlops*.

Wallach (1993) supported the recognition of *Rhinotyphlops* as a full genus and pointed out the value of the supralabial imbrication pattern (SIP) as a taxonomic character. Roux-Estève (1974) had illustrated the SIP for 22 species of *Typhlops*. Subsequently Wallach (1998), in an unpublished Ph.D. thesis, proposed a radical restructuring of the Typhlopidae at the generic level, and here we deal with the East African species of *Typhlops sensu* Roux-Estève (1974).

Spawls *et al.* (2002) continued to recognize both *Typhlops* and *Rhinotyphlops*. Broadley & Wallach (2000), while proposing to revalidate *Letheobia* for Roux-Estève's *Rhinotyphlops* Group VI, transferred Roux-Estève's (1974) *Typhlops* Groups IV, VI, VII and VIII to *Rhinotyphlops* based upon the presence of a vestigial left lung as also found in Roux-Estève's (1974) *Rhinotyphlops* Group I species (Wallach, 1993b, 1998b). This arrangement was followed by Branch (2005).