



Rediscovery of the Liberian Nimba toad, *Nimbaphrynoides liberiensis* (Xavier, 1978) (Amphibia: Anura: Bufonidae), and reassessment of its taxonomic status

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Abstract

We report on the search and rediscovery of the Liberian Nimba toad, *Nimbaphrynoides liberiensis*, 30 years after its original description. A small surviving population could be traced in the surroundings of the type locality Mount Alpha, Liberia. The type locality was meanwhile destroyed by open cast mining. Similar to the Guinean Nimba toad, *Nimbaphrynoides occidentalis*, the Liberian toad lives exclusively in open, savanna like habitats above 1200 m a.s.l. The presumably few surviving individuals and the small and patchy distribution classify the Liberian toads as Critically Endangered (Stuart *et al.* 2008). A morphological, acoustical and genetic comparison of Liberian and Guinean populations revealed only minor, but distinct morphological (size, colour) differences. Genetically and acoustically the two taxa were indistinguishable. We therefore propose to consider the two populations as conspecific and to consider *Nimbaphrynoides liberiensis* (Xavier, 1978) as junior synonym of *Nimbaphrynoides occidentalis* (Angel, 1943). Because of the morphological differences we propose to treat the Liberian population as a subspecies of the Guinean toad and herein introduce the new name: *Nimbaphrynoides occidentalis liberiensis*.

Key words: Conservation status, Guinea, Liberia, mining, montane grassland, *Nimbaphrynoides occidentalis*, *Nimbaphrynoides occidentalis liberiensis*, taxonomy

Introduction

In 1943 F. Angel described a new toad species from Mount Nimba as *Nectophrynoides occidentalis*. He first believed that this toad was ovo-viviparous, but soon new data on the spectacular, truly viviparous reproductive biology of this unique toad became known (e.g. Angel & Lamotte 1944, 1948; current knowledge summarized by Xavier 1986). This toad was exclusively recorded from a few km² of montane grasslands on the Guinean part of Mount Nimba (Lamotte 1959; Lamotte & Sanchez-Lamotte 1999; Hillers *et al.* 2008; very recently we detected one site on the Ivorian part of the mountain, L. Sandberger *et al.* unpubl. data). The Nimba mountain range includes parts being positioned in nowadays Guinea, Ivory Coast and Liberia (Lamotte 1998; Lamotte & Roy 2003). Due to rich deposits of iron ore the mountains were in the focus of mining prospecting activities since the 1950s (Lamotte 1983).

In the course of iron ore prospecting in the Liberian part of the Nimba range M. Coe detected Nimba toads on Liberia's highest mountain, the Mount Alpha in 1964. These toads were subsequently described by F. Xavier as a new likewise viviparous species, *Nectophrynoides liberiensis* (Xavier 1978; Fig. 1). This