



Studies on African *Agama* VIII. A new subspecies of *Agama caudospinosa* Meek, 1910 (Sauria: Agamidae)

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Abstract

In the course of a recent taxonomic study on East African *Agama* species it became clear that a population of *A. caudospinosa* Meek, 1910 from Mt. Kenya is clearly distinct to specimens from the type locality at Lake Elmenteita (both in Kenya). Therefore, a new subspecies is described on the basis of morphological characters. This new subspecies shows a similar colouration in both sexes which is unique in the genus *Agama*.

Key words: Reptilia, Sauria, Agamidae, *Agama*, *Agama caudospinosa spawlsi* **ssp. n.**, Africa, Kenya

Introduction

Intense recent research activities involving East African taxa of the genus *Agama* Daudin, 1802 in recent years indicates that the species diversity has been underestimated. In 2005 Böhme *et al.* demonstrated that the former East African subspecies of the Central and West African *Agama agama* (Linnaeus, 1758) are distinct enough to be regarded as a discrete polytypic species complex. Consequently, *Agama lionotus* Boulenger, 1896 was recognized as a full species with the following subspecies; *lionotus*, *elgonis*, *dodomae*, *ufipae* and *usambarae*. Subsequently, Wagner (2007) has shown that *A. l. usambarae* Barbour & Loveridge, 1928 is a synonym of the nominate subspecies. More recently, Wagner *et al.* (2008a, 2008b) resurrected *A. kaimosae* Loveridge, 1935 and *A. turuensis* Loveridge, 1932.

One of the most impressive *Agama* species in East Africa is the Kenyan endemic *Agama caudospinosa*. Described by Meek (1910), initially it was first wrongly regarded as a subspecies of *Agama planiceps* Peters, 1862 by Loveridge (1936) and later elevated to full species rank by Wermuth (1967). The species occupies a very restricted range and occurs in high Central Kenya between Maralal in the north and Kedong Valley in the south, extending westwards to Kisumu and eastwards to Nanyuki and the western foothills of Mount Kenya. *A. caudospinosa* is a large, flat and secretive species with a maximum size of about 45 cm (Spawls *et al.* 2002). It is characterized by its broad and flattened body and especially by the broad and muscular tail base. However, Meek (1910) does not give a description of the colouration of living animals. According to his description based on preserved material, *A. caudospinosa* is a uniform dark brownish species with light cross lines or blotches on rump and tail.

During the above mentioned study on East African *Agama* species it became obvious that specimens of *A. caudospinosa* from the most eastwards extension of the distribution range in the vicinity of Mount Kenya have a distinct colouration and differ from specimens from the type locality at Lake Elmenteita near Nakuru. This paper aims to describe the populations from Mt. Kenya as a new subspecies.