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.