



Article

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Systematics of the *Dendrophidion nuchale* complex (Serpentes: Colubridae) with the description of a new species from Central America

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Abstract

We review the systematics of the *Dendrophidion nuchale* complex in Central America and northern South America and recognize three species. The names *D. nuchale* (W. Peters) and *D. clarkii* Dunn apply to two of the species. The third is described as a new species, *D. rufiterminorum*. It differs from *D. clarkii* and *D. nuchale* in coloration and hemipenial characters but all three species of the *nuchale* complex are very similar in scutellation characters. *Dendrophidion nuchale* is distributed in the coast ranges and adjacent foothills of northern Venezuela, and in a seemingly disjunct population in the Serranía de Perijá in western Venezuela. The name *clarkii* was recently applied to all populations of the *nuchale* complex from Belize and Guatemala in the north to western Colombia and Ecuador in the south. Herein, we restrict the name *D. clarkii* to populations in lower Middle America (Costa Rica and Panama) and west of the Andes in Colombia and Ecuador. *Dendrophidion rufiterminorum* is distributed in northern Central America (Belize, Guatemala, northern Honduras) followed by a broad disjunction without records of the species throughout most of Honduras and Nicaragua; thereafter, a few specimens and photographs document the presence of *D. rufiterminorum* on the Caribbean versant of southern Nicaragua and Costa Rica, and uplands of northwestern Costa Rica (Pacific versant). Two localities of sympatry between *D. rufiterminorum* and *D. clarkii* are known in Costa Rica (one on the Atlantic versant, the other on Pacific versant). Nonetheless, there is sparse documentation of either species in Costa Rica. The populations referred to *D. clarkii* in southwestern Costa Rica, the eastern half of Panama, and western Colombia and Ecuador need further study. Hemipenes of species of the *nuchale* complex are described. All three species have a pair of enormously enlarged sulcate spines and a regular linear array of enlarged spines (spinose annulus) encircling the base of the apical region. These characters are also shared with *D. dendrophis* sensu lato but not other members of the *dendrophis* species group.

Key words: Belize, Honduras, Costa Rica, Colubrinae, hemipenis, taxonomy, distribution

Resumen

Revisamos la sistemática del complejo *Dendrophidion nuchale* en Centro América y el norte de Sur América. Reconocemos tres especies. Se aplican los nombres *D. nuchale* (W. Peters) y *D. clarkii* Dunn a dos de las especies. La tercera se describe como una nueva especie, *D. rufiterminorum*. Este difiere de *D. clarkii* y *D. nuchale* en coloración y caracteres de los hemipenes pero las tres especies del complejo *nuchale* son muy similares en caracteres de la escutellación. *Dendrophidion nuchale* se distribuye en el norte de Venezuela en las sierras costeñas y tierras bajas adyacentes. También se encuentra en una población aislada en la Serranía de Perijá de Venezuela occidental. El nombre *clarkii* se aplicaba recién a todas poblaciones del complejo *nuchale* desde Belice y Guatemala al norte hasta Colombia y Ecuador occidental al sur. Aquí, restringimos el nombre *D. clarkii* a las poblaciones en la parte baja de América Central (Costa Rica y Panamá) y oeste de los Andes en Colombia y Ecuador. *Dendrophidion rufiterminorum* se distribuye en Centro América del norte (Belize, Guatemala, norte de Honduras), seguido por una amplia disjunción sin registros de la especie en la mayor parte de Honduras y Nicaragua; después, pocos especímenes y fotografías documentan la presencia de *D. rufiterminorum* en la vertiente caribeña del sur de Nicaragua y Costa Rica, y tierras altas del noroeste de Costa Rica (vertiente Pacífica). Se