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Lizard Wears Shades. A Spectacled *Sphenomorphus* (Squamata: Scincidae), from the Sacred Forests of Mawphlang, Meghalaya, North-east India

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Abstract

A new species of lygosomatine scincid lizard is described from the sacred forests of Mawphlang, in Meghalaya, north-eastern India. *Sphenomorphus apalpebratus* sp. nov. possesses a spectacle or brille, an unusual feature within the Scincidae, and a first for the paraphyletic genus *Sphenomorphus*. The new species is compared with other members of the genus to which it is here assigned, as well as to members of the lygosomatine genera *Lipinia* and *Scincella* from mainland India, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and south-east Asia, to which it also bears resemblance. The new taxon is diagnosable in exhibiting the following combination of characters: small body size (SVL to 42.0 mm); moveable eyelids absent; auricular opening scaleless, situated in a shallow depression; dorsal scales show a line of demarcation along posterior edge of ventral pes; midbody scale rows 27–28; longitudinal scale rows between parietals and base of tail 62–64; lamellae under toe IV 8–9; supraoculars five; supralabials 5–6; infralabials 4–5; subcaudals 92; and dorsum golden brown, except at dorsal margin of lateral line, which is lighter, with four faintly spotted lines, two along each side of vertebral row of scales, that extend to tail base. The new species differs from its congeners in the lack of moveable eyelids, a character shared with several distantly related scincid genera.

Key words: Squamata, Sauria, Scincidae, *Sphenomorphus*, new species, phylogenetic relationships, Meghalaya, India

Introduction

The origin and composition of the herpetofauna of peninsular India has been the topic of recent scholarly debate with various models being put forward, including African, Madagascan, South-east Asian or indigenous origins (see Bossuyt & Milinkovitch 2001; Biju & Bossuyt 2003; Datta-Roy *et al.* 2012). However, not much has been discussed regarding the origins of the fauna of its north-eastern region, which lies in the Indo-Burman region (*sensu van Dijk et al.* 1999), comprising north-eastern India, adjacent regions of China's Sichuan and Yunnan Provinces, Myanmar, Thailand, Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam (see Kamei *et al.* 2012; Tordoff *et al.* 2012), and synonymous with the Indochinese subregion of some authors (Corbet & Hill 1992). The north-eastern part of India is also especially interesting because of its unique hill ranges with different geological origins. The Himalayan range itself is relatively recent, originating from the collision of the Indian plate with the Asian continent (Krishnan 1974). South of the eastern Himalayas, the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills are relatively older, dating back to the Cretaceous (see Hora 1944; Valdiya 2010). The dearth of studies in north-eastern India appears to stem from a combination of factors, such as poor infrastructure, complicated territorial claims by multiple countries, the proliferation of tribal militant groups, diseases and other health-related factors, and complicated permitting and physical access regimes.