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## Description of a new Tiger Snake (Colubridae, *Telescopus*) from south-western Africa

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### Abstract

*Telescopus finkeldeyi* sp. nov. is described from western central to northern Namibia and south-western Angola. Its maximum size is less than that of the other three taxa occurring in southern Africa. It is further distinguished by its fairly variable colour pattern. Although the number of ventrals and the undivided anal scale are similar to that of *T. beetzii*, the presence of 19 scale rows around the middle differs from the 21 rows of *T. beetzii*.

**Key words:** Snakes, Namib Desert, Namibia, Angola, morphology.

### Introduction

The genus *Telescopus* Wagler, 1830, usually referred to as Cat or Tiger Snakes, currently includes 13 species (Uetz & Hosek 2013) widely distributed from south-eastern Europe and south-western Asia, through most of Africa from the north into southern Africa. The first record of this genus in southern Africa dates back to 1849 when Andrew Smith described *T. semiannulatus*, without type locality but presumably from southern Africa. Later, its distribution was established to reach as far north as Kenya. It was only in 1922, when Barbour described *T. beetzii* from Kolmanskop in the vicinity of Lüderitz in the Namib Desert, that a second species for southern Africa was documented. Initially it appeared to have a very restricted range within southern Namibia (FitzSimons, 1962), but its range is now known to extend southwards across the Karoo and into the Western Cape and Free State (Broadley, 1983. Branch, 1988). In 1954 Mertens described the western population of *T. semiannulatus* in Namibia as a separate subspecies, i.e. *T. s. polystictus*, thereby recording three taxa in the genus in the subcontinent.

In May 1959, when on the way to select the site for Gobabeb, the future Namib Desert Research Station, the team representing the Transvaal Museum spent a night in a hotel in Usakos. Checking a collection of preserved reptiles in the bar of the hotel, Dr. V. F. M. FitzSimons (pers.com.) was presented with a *Telescopus* specimen, which had been bleached in the preservative and was not identifiable. In March 1968 the late Mr. Attila Port, a former Honorary Member of the Transvaal Museum, donated three *Telescopus* specimens amongst other reptiles from his Farm Valencia (2316Ab) in the Khomas Hochland on the edge of the western escarpment of Namibia. One specimen (TM35604) differed from the two *T. s. polystictus* in this sample, by having an undivided anal scale. In 1971 the author collected another specimen in south-western Angola, which had an unfamiliar colour pattern but shared scalation characteristics with the two previously unidentified specimens from central western Namibia. A similar dead-on-road specimen from near the Arandis station, north-east of Swakopmund, stimulated interest and literature records and collections of various museums, especially in Germany, were examined unsuccessfully for additional material from the colonial period. From December 1977 to December 1979 Mr J. A. van Rooyen donated five similar *Telescopus* specimens from the operational area of the Rössing Uranium Mine. Further specimens were donated from that general area, indicating that this new species was relatively common in the area from Swakopmund to Usakos and as far as Karibib. Recently, six specimens from the late Mr. John Visser's private collection (now added in the TM collection, Pretoria) from this area added further support. Additional records confirmed the presence of this snake in the Kaokoveld, forming a connection to the isolated record in Angola. Apart from the Farm Valencia (2316Ab, Nr 42 Windhoek district), sympatry with *T.s. polystictus* has only been documented on the Farm Navarre (2015Cc, Nr 383 Khorixas district).

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