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A new species of monadal coral snake of the genus *Micrurus* (Serpentes, Elapidae) from western Amazon

DARLAN TAVARES FEITOSA^{1,4}, NELSON JORGE DA SILVA JR.¹, MATHEUS GODOY PIRES¹, HUSSAM ZAHER² & ANA LÚCIA DA COSTA PRUDENTE³

¹ Pós-graduação em Ciências Ambientais e Saúde, Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Goiás, Rua 232 n° 128, 3° andar, Área V, Setor Leste Universitário, CEP 74605-140, Goiânia, Goiás, Brazil

² Museu de Zoologia da Universidade de São Paulo, Avenida Nazaré 481, Ipiranga, São Paulo, CEP 04263-000, São Paulo, Brazil

³ Laboratório de Herpetologia, Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi, Avenida Perimetral 1901, CP 399, CEP 66040-170, Belém, Pará, Brazil

⁴ Corresponding autor: E-mail: dfeitos@gmail.com

Abstract

We described a new species of monadal coral snake of the genus *Micrurus* from the region of Tabatinga and Leticia, along the boundaries of Brazil, Colombia, and Peru. The new species can be distinguished from the other congeners by the combination of the following characters: absence of a pale nuchal collar; black cephalic-cap extending from rostral to first dorsal scale and enclosing white tipped prefrontal scales; upper half of first to four supralabials and postoculars black; tricolor body coloration, with 27–31 black rings bordered by narrower white rings and 27–31 red rings; tail coloration similar to body, with alternating black rings bordered by irregular narrow white rings, red rings of the same width as the black rings; ventral scales 205–225; subcaudal scales 39–47.

Key words: Monadal species of *Micrurus*, external morphology, color patterns, taxonomy

Introduction

The genus *Micrurus* Wagler, 1824 comprises 77 currently recognized species, ranging from southeastern United States to northeastern Argentina (Roze, 1996; Campbell & Lamar 2004; Lavin-Murcio & Dixon, 2004; Di Bernardo *et al.* 2007; Starace 2013; Pires *et al.* 2014). Campbell & Lamar (2004) recognized four species groups within the genus *Micrurus* mainly based on their color patterns: a Central American triadal group, a South American triadal group, a bicolored group, and a monadal group. The monadal group represents a well-supported monophyletic group (Slowinski 1995; Castoe *et al.* 2007; Renjifo *et al.* 2012) that includes 44 Central and South American species (24 them restricted to South America), morphologically characterized by their bicolor tail and by a slender and strongly bilobed hemipenis (Campbell & Lamar 2004).

As a general rule in the genus *Micrurus*, scutellation and ornamentation of scales are greatly homogeneous, with all species retaining a similar pattern of head shields, smooth dorsal scales arranged in 15 rows without reduction and with no apical pits, divided cloacal plate (except in *M. hemprichii* (Jan, 1858)), and paired subcaudals (except in the *M. spixii* Wagler, 1824 complex) (Roze 1996; Silva Jr. & Sites 1999). Although traditional meristic characters are often of little value in diagnosing many species of *Micrurus*, their conspicuous aposematic color patterns are extremely useful for that purpose and have traditionally been used in the taxonomy of the genus (Roze 1983, 1996; Slowinski 1995). However, the poorly understanding of the polychromatic phenomena in *Micrurus* lead some authors to erroneous identification or even unsuitable delimitation of species from the monadal group (Abuys 1987; Roze 1994; Feitosa *et al.* 2007a); since some taxa have polychromatic patterns not geographically established (Soini 1974).

Here, we describe a new species of *Micrurus* that occurs along the frontiers of Brazil, Colombia, and Peru on the basis of unique combination of morphological characters. Additionally, we compared the new species with all species of the monadal group that occur in the western Amazon.