

A REPORT ON A SMALL COLLECTION OF REPTILES FROM SOUTHERN ANGOLA

W. R. BRANCH and C. J. McCARTNEY

Port Elizabeth Museum, P.O. Box 13147, Humewood 6013, South Africa

ABSTRACT

A small collection of reptiles is reported from the vicinity of Cuito Cuanavale, a herpetologically poorly-known region in southeast Angola. It contains three species of lizard (including the skink *Sepsina angolensis* and the first record of *Ichnotropis capensis capensis* from Angola), eight snake species (including the first record of *Xenocalamus mechowi inornatus* and third record of *Mehelya capensis capensis* from Angola), and the second Angolan record of the amphisbaenid *Dalophia pistillum*. Observations on other reptiles from the region are appended.

Introduction

The herpetofauna of many regions of Angola remains very poorly-known. The monograph of Bocage (1895) remains the last synopsis of the country's herpetofauna, although subsequent collections have been reported by Schmidt (1933), Parker (1936), Monard (1937), Mertens (1938), Hellmich (1957a,b), and Laurent (1964). However, most collections were obtained from the western and central regions; none originate from eastern Angola.

Whilst on active military duty in southeastern Angola in March-April 1988, one of us (CJM) took the opportunity to collect a small sample of reptiles. All collecting and observations were opportunistic and severely limited by the very active armed confrontation, with much time being spent excavating bunkers and foxholes. These unusual circumstances created an opportunity for the discovery of fossorial species. Preserved material has been deposited in the Port Elizabeth Museum herpetological collection (PEM). This report gives details of this small collection, and is supplemented with notes on other reptiles observed in the region.

Materials and Methods

The following abbreviations for scutellation details are employed: SR = scale rows (neck, mid-body, vent); V = ventrals; SC = subcaudals (+ spine); UL (x, x) = upper labials (number entering orbit); LL (x, x) = lower labials (in contact with anterior chin shields). For head shields, counts on the right side of the head are given first. Except for rare species, only diagnostic or unusual scutellation features are listed.

The collecting period coincided with the wet season, and rain was recorded on all but three days during the period 2 March - 14 April 1988. The topography of eastern Angola is very flat with isolated higher ground at the sources of the major rivers, notably of the Chaminga (Chambiaia) River. The vegetation is open woodland savannah, dominated by *Commiphora* and *Combretum* trees, interspersed with large marshy areas ('shonas'). The soil is extremely sandy and can be divided into three distinct layers; an upper layer about 3 cm deep composed of organic material and ash, a middle layer of coarse white sand to a depth of approximately 60 cm, and a third layer of finer yellow sand of undetermined depth but which reaches down to at least 3 m.

Species Accounts

Sauria

Scincidae

Sepsina angolensis Bocage 1866

PEM R4816; approximately 75 km W of Mavinga (15°47'S, 19°42'E; 1519Dc); caught at 19h00 in loose leaf litter, 14 March 1988.

A large adult female (91 + 54 mm - distal 8 mm of tail lost during capture). Scutellation: The interparietal is small and triangular, and the specimen conforms well with FitzSimons' (1943) description of the species. As usual there are three clawed digits on all feet (except for the left manus which has only 2 claws).

Remarks: A poorly known fossorial skink. Monard (1937) considered the species to be widely distributed in Angola, mostly on the high plateau, but also below the escarpment of the Sierra de Chela. Laurent (1964) recorded a specimen from Calundo, Moxico, in northeastern Angola, and Broadley (1971a) notes that the species reaches its eastern limit in western Zambia at Kalabo. The Mavinga specimen is the first recorded from southeastern Angola.

Mabuya striata wahlbergi (Peters 1869)

PEM R4821; approximately 75 km W of Mavinga (15°40'S, 19°42'E; 1519Da); found among a pile of stores, 13 April 1988.

An adult male (71 + 122 mm). Scutellation: 36 MSR, dorsal scales tricarinate (without development of additional short keels lateral to main ones; cf. Broadley, 1977). Ventrums immaculate and with a faint black lateral band from the eye to shoulder.

Remarks: The first record of this common, widespread skink from southeastern Angola.

Lacertidae

Ichnotropis capensis capensis (A. Smith 1838)

PEM R4822; approximately 50 km E of Cuito Cuanavale (15°14'S, 19°37'E; 1519Ba); caught in foxhole at about 10h00, 4 April 1988.

An adult male (45 + 104 mm), with two termite heads in stomach. Scutellation: 4 UL prior to subocular; 38 scales midbody; 24 lamella under fourth toe; occipital well-developed, crescentic, and extending only slightly behind parietals; striations on head well-developed; 12/13 femoral pores.

Remarks: This specimen appears to be the first record of the nominate race from Angola.

Serpentes

Colubridae

Lycophidion multimaculatum Boettger 1888

PEM R4819; approximately 50 km E of Cuito Cuanavale (15°14'S, 19°37'E; 1519Ba); found 60 cm underground in loose sandy soil, 1 April 1988.

A juvenile female (144 + 18 = 157 mm) with an immaculate

ventrum and 49 red-brown (when alive and in preservative) blotches/bars on the body. Scutellation: 17 MSR, 167 V, 31 + S SC.

Remarks: Broadley (1991) has elevated this form to full species following sympatry between it and typical *L. capense* at Katima Mulilo, Namibia.

Mehelya capensis capensis (A. Smith 1847)

Not collected; approximately 14 km NE of Mapupa (17°23'S, 20°05'E; 1720Ac); 5 March 1988.

Two adults (TL approx 140 cm) killed in camp. Only one was closely examined as the other had putrified before being discovered. Scutellation: 15 MSR; 210 V; 50 + S SC.

Remarks: The low MSR and ventral counts confirm that the specimen was referable to *M. capensis* (MSR 19, ventrals over 250 in *M. vernayi*). This is the third record of the species from Angola. The others include records from Vila-da-Ponte, 200 km S Nova Lisboa (= Huambo) (Monard, 1937), and Lac Calundo, Moxico (11°48'S, 20°52'E) (Laurent, 1964). The closest recorded locality is Katima Mulilo (Haacke, 1981).

Aparallactus capensis (A. Smith 1849)

PEM R4820; approximately 50 km E of Cuito Cuanavale (15°14'S, 19°37'E; 1519Ba); found DOR at 08h00. 2 April 1988.

An adult male (231 + 61 = 292 mm) with empty stomach. Scutellation: 15,15,15 SR; 139 V; 48 + S SC; 5 (2-3) UL; 6 (1-4) LL.

Remarks: The specimen has an unusually low number of upper labials and a short, blunt head, but is otherwise typical for the species.

Xenocalamus mechowii inornatus (Witte and Laurent 1947)

PEM R4814; approximately 45 km S of Lupire (15°05'S, 19°35'E; 1519Ba); collected at about 07h30 as a freshly killed DOR specimen, 17 March 1988. Habitat open savannah with isolated clumps of large trees.

An adult female (500 + 34 = 534 mm); stomach empty. Scutellation: 17 MSR, 275 V, 25 SC (+ rounded tip); other head shields and colouration as illustrated in Broadley (1971b, 1983).

Remarks: The specimen appears to be the first record from Angola for the southern race (that is characterized by high (267-296) ventral counts; Broadley, 1971b).

Psammophis phillipsii (Hallowell 1844)

PEM R4815; 75 km W of Mavinga (15°47'S, 19°42'E; 1519Da); found under log, 11 March 1988.

A juvenile (350 + 142 = 492 mm) with empty stomach. Scutellation: 17,17,13 SR; 172 V; 99 + S SC; divided anal: 8 (4-5) UL that are well-spotted; 10 (1-5) LL.

Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia (Laurenti 1768)

Two specimens; approximately 23 km SE of Cuito Cuanavale (15°20'S, 19°20'E; 1519Ad); collected during late afternoon (18h00) on 22 and 23 March 1988, respectively.

PEM R4812, a juvenile female (201 + 28 = 229). Scutellation and colouration: as above, except with 148 V, 36 + S SC, upper of two post-oculars much larger than lower. The eye is relatively larger, but this may reflect ontogenetic change.

PEM R4813, a juvenile female (230 + 38 = 268 mm). Scutellation: 17,19,15 SR; 149 V; 38 + S SC; 8 (3-4) UL; 11 (2-5) LL; first lower labials in contact behind mental; 3 pairs anterior chin shields; two post-oculars.

The colouration of both is very similar. The body is olive-brown with white-tipped scales forming irregular thin bars on forebody, but which are scattered towards the rear; ventrum immaculate; temporal region and crown of head black-brown; upper labials white.

Remarks: A third specimen was also collected on 23 March but later escaped. This locality was far from any water source and there were no signs of amphibians (their usual food preference) in the vicinity. As noted by Mertens (1955) and Laurent (1964), central African populations have white upper labials, unlike the characteristic red-lip of southern African Herald snakes.

Dispholidus typus typus - *D. t. punctatus*

PEM R4817; approximately 24 km E of Cuito Cuanavale (15°11'S, 19°23'E; 1519Ab); early April 1988.

A juvenile female (381 + 117 = 498 mm). Scutellation: 104 SC; 194 V. Colouration: The specimen still retains the cryptic juvenile 'twig' colouration, although the eye was a bright yellow-green.

Remarks: The specimen cannot be assigned to either race as it still has the juvenile colouration, and the 'diagnostic' subcaudal counts for the races overlap (*D. typus typus*, subcaudals 110-136 in males, 104-127 in females; *D. t. punctatus*, 97-117 in males, 90-109 in females) (Laurent, 1964).

Viperidae

Bitis arietans arietans (Merrem 1820)

Collected but not retained; approximately 33 km ESE of Cuito Cuanavale (15°17'S, 19°30'E; 1519Bc); caught in a foxhole, 31 March 1988.

A juvenile of about 350 mm TL, with fairly dark colouration but well-defined markings.

Remarks: The head appeared to be narrower than specimens found in the Eastern Cape Province.

Amphisbaenia

Amphisbaenidae

Dalophia pistillum (Boettger 1895)

PEM R4818; approximately 50 km E of Cuito Cuanavale (15°14'S, 19°37'E; 1519Ba); found 60cm underground in loose sandy soil, 1 April 1988.

An medium-sized adult female (330 + 44 mm). Scutellation: 322 body annuli; 30 (+ rounded tip) caudal annuli; no pores.

Remarks: Although normally described as being uniform

flesh-coloured, this specimen was pure white when first caught and only later changed to a flesh colour when exposed to light. It discoloured ('bruised') readily and appeared desiccated after being exposed for a short period. This appears to be only the second record from Angola. The other specimen is the holotype of *M. granti kuanyamarum* from Mupanda (Broadley *et al.*, 1976). The nearest record is Kalabo, western Zambia (Broadley *et al.*, 1976), 320 km to the west.

Crocodylia

Crocodyliidae

Crocodylus niloticus

Not collected; The only sighting was a 2 m individual below the Mapupa Falls (17°31'S, 20°03'E; 1720Ca). It was reported to be common at this locality.

Remarks: *C. niloticus* is common in all the major permanent river systems, notably the Cuito and Rio Cubango rivers. They were responsible for at least one recorded attack on a South African soldier during the period in question (Romer-Heitman, 1990). A second disappearance of a soldier while swimming in the Cuito River was probably another fatal crocodile attack.

Discussion:

Southeast Angola consists almost exclusively of sparse woodland savannah with scattered 'shonas'. There are no stones or rocky outcrops. The majority of reptiles observed were arboreal, eg. *Mabuya striata wahlbergi*. A number of fossorial reptiles were also collected, due to the extensive excavations necessary to withstand air and artillery bombardment. More peaceful conditions would have allowed the collection of a larger number of terrestrial species.

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