Four Remarkable Reptiles from South China Sea Islands, Hong Kong Territory

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Key Words: Reptilia, Squamata, Hong Kong, distribution.

![Map of Hong Kong and nearby islands]

\textbf{FIG. 1.} Hong Kong and nearby islands. 1. Hei Ling Chau. 2. Shek Kwu Chau. 3. High West Pokfulam, Hong Kong Island.

\section*{Introduction}

There are at least one hundred vegetated islands, presumably supporting amphibians and/or reptiles, within the Hong Kong Territory. This is estimated to be about three percent of the total number of continental shelf islands in the South China Sea between Taiwan and Hainan Dao. Nevertheless, the number of endemic and isolated species documented from the territory in the comprehensive work of Karsen, Lau, and Bogadek (1986) is high: four endemics and at least fifteen widely disjunct populations. Here we add two species not previously recorded (both widely disjunct) and new records of species poorly documented before (Fig. 1). Voucher specimens are in the Museum of Comparative Zoology (MCZ), Harvard University.

\textit{Dibamus cf. bourreti} (White-tailed Two-footed Lizard)

A single specimen, MCZ 172041, was
collected by Anthony Bogadek, 1 April 1987, on Hei Ling Chau ca. 10 km southwest of Victoria, Hong Kong—a range extension northeast for the genus, and family Dibamidae of ca. 800 km (Lazell 1988).

The specimen, a 177 mm SVL male, was sent to Allen Greer, Australian Museum, Sydney, for identification. He believed the specimen was "probably" Dibamus bourreti (in litt., 9 May 1988). However, we note the following sharp distinctions from D. bourreti as diagnosed and described by Greer (1985: 148): the rostral suture is not complete, not present from lip to nostril but only posterior to the nostril. There is a prominent labial suture. There are no preanal or tibial pores. Dibamus bourreti is diagnosed as having a complete rostral suture, no labial suture, and four preanal pores on each side, even in a female—the highest count in Dibamus.

This specimen, MCZ 172041, has 23 scale rows at midbody, six scales fronting the hindlimb where Greer (1985:120) shows D. novaeguinae having four, and six rows of preanal scales where Greer (1985:120) shows D. novaeguinae having three. The hindlimb is 2.7% of SVL. The tail is 22.6% of SVL. In life this specimen was lilac of lavender-gray shading to buff on the head and chalk-white on the tail. It is much paler and less contrastingly marked than the Guangxi D. bourreti illustrated by Tian and Jiang (1986). See Figure 2.

**Typhlops albiceps**

This tiny snake, apparently rare throughout its range, was known from Hong Kong Island only on the basis of two specimens collected in 1959 and 1966 (Karlsen et al. 1986), now in the British Museum (Natural History): BMNH 1954.1.13.4 and BMNH 1983.946, respectively. It was rediscovered 27 May 1988 at High West, Pokfulam, Hong Kong Island by Sandra Brown (Macklin 1988). The species appears reasonably common at this site. Voucher specimens are at the St. Louis School, West Point, Hong Kong (curated by Anthony Bogadek) and at MCZ (MCZ 173290).

Lance (1976) did not recognize "Typhlina" or "Ramphotyphops" and neither do we. The putative distinction from Typhops is entirely in male genitalia (McDowell 1974). Because females are indistinguishable, recognition of "Typhlina" or "Ramphotyphops" directly violates the principles of systematic zoology (Mayr et al. 1953) and the principles of animal taxonomy (Simpson 1961).

This is the only species of Typhlops in China with 18 scale rows. It is very slender, the head spatulate. MCZ 173290 is 155.5 mm SVL with a 2.5 mm tail. The dorsum is wood brown shading to buff on the head. The chin is near-white; this color extends posteriorly for 10 scales onto the throat. The tail tip is near-white; this color extends anteroventrally on all 10 subcaudal scales and 4 rows anterior to the vent.

**Dendrelaphis pictus**

(Painted Bronze Back Snake)

This elegant snake is known from Guangdong, Guangxi, and Yunnan (Hu et al. 1980), and from Hong Kong on the basis of a single report (Wall 1903). One of us (Lazell) has searched both BMNH and MCZ for this specimen with no success. Peaker (1987) criticized Karsen et al. (1986) for including this species in the Hong Kong fauna. Deletion would have
TABLE 1. Some scale counts for Chinese *Ahaetulla prasina*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mainland</th>
<th>Shek Kwu Chau</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ventral, males</td>
<td>186-209</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ventral, females</td>
<td>191-204</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subcaudal, males</td>
<td>155-177</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subcaudal, females</td>
<td>150-169</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

been premature. Between 1971 and 1984 Dr. Barry Holllinrake, resident of Shek Kwu Chau, a small island 1.3 km south of Languau, amassed a collection of 35 snakes on the island of 9 species, now housed at MCZ (Boalch 1988). Among these is a beautiful female *Dendrelaphis pictus* with 15 dorsal scale rows, 171 ventrals, and 131 subcaudals: MCZ 173278.

The ventral and subcaudal counts of the Shek Kwu Chau specimen are significantly lower than those given by Hu et al. (1980: 39): 184 ventrals (females 186-193) and 141-169 subcaudals (females 141-169).

*Ahaetulla prasina* (Jade Vine Snake)

Two specimens of this spectacular snake, never previously recorded in Hong Kong Territory, are in the Hollinrake collection from Shek Kwu Chau: male, MCZ 173303, and female, MCZ 173304. Their scale counts are much higher than those given by Pope (1935) of Hu et al. (1980) for this widespread South China species: Table 1.

**Literature Cited**


