

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

JAMES LAZELL¹ AND WENHUA LU¹

¹The Conservation Agency, Rhode Island 02835, USA

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

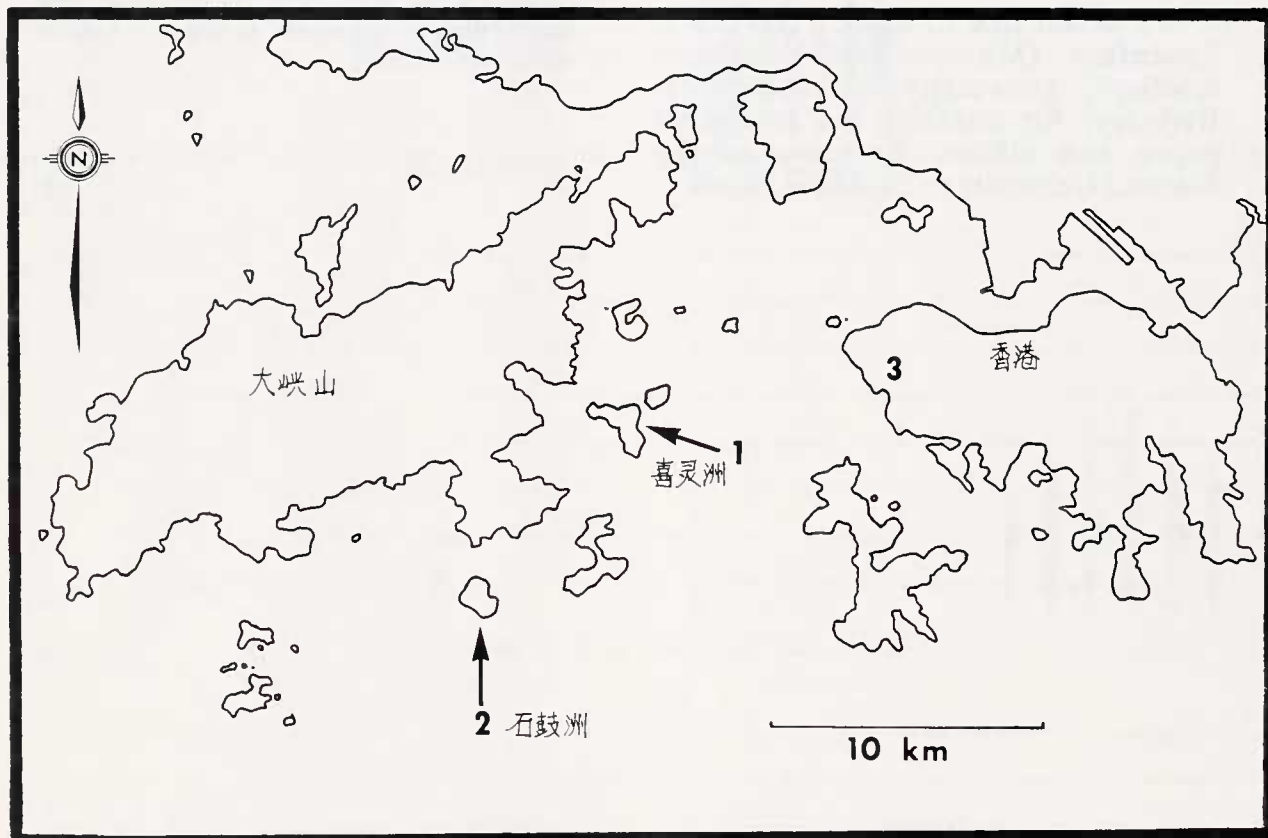


FIG. 1. Hong Kong and nearby islands. 1. Hei Ling Chau. 2. Shek Kwu Chau. 3. High West Pokfulam, Hong Kong Island.

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.

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. *Dibamis 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

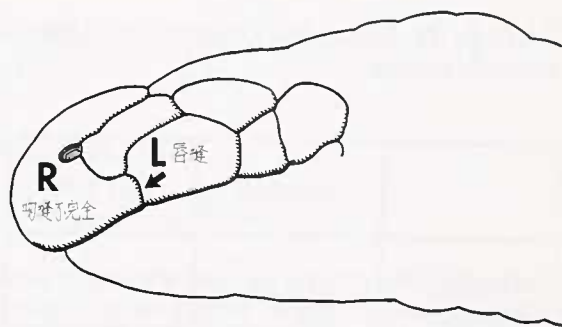


FIG. 2. *Dibamus* sp. from Hei Ling Chau. The rostral, R, lacks a suture from lip to nostril. A labial suture, L, is present.

(MCZ 173290).

Lance (1976) did not recognize "*Typhlina*" or "*Ramphotyphlops*" and neither do we. The putative distinction from *Typhlops* is entirely in male genitalia (McDowell 1974). Because females are indistinguishable, recognition of "*Typhlina*" or "*Ramphotyphlops*" 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*.

	Mainland	Shek Kwu Chau
Ventrals, males	186-209	217
Ventrals, females	191-204	224
Subcaudals, males	155-177	—
Subcaudals, females	150-169	184

been premature. Between 1971 and 1984 Dr. Barry Hollinrake, resident of Shek Kwu Chau, a small island 1.3 km south of Lanau, 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

- BOALCH, K. 1988. Snakes alive—a specialist's delight. *South China Post* 154(113):3.
- GREER, A. 1985. The relationships of the lizard genera *Anelytropsis* and *Dibamus*. *Journal of Herpetology* 19:116-156.
- HU, B., M. HUANG, Z. XIE, E. ZHAO, Y. JIANG, Z. YU, AND J. MA. 1980. Illustrated snakes of China. Science and Technology Press, Shanghai.
- KARSEN, S. M. LAU, AND A. BOGADEK. 1986. Hong Kong amphibians and reptiles. Urban Council, Hong Kong. 136 pp.
- LANCE, V. A. 1976. The land vertebrates of Hong Kong, Pp. 6-22. In B. Lofts (ed). The fauna of Hong Kong. Royal Asiatic Society, Hong Kong.
- LAZELL, J. 1988. A leg up—by 800 kilometers. *Assoc. Pacific Systematists Newsletter* 5:2.
- MACKLIN, S. 1988. Reclusive reptile has biologists bewildered. *South China Morning Post* 154(147):1.
- MAYR, E., E. G. LINSLEY, AND R. L. USINGER. 1953. Methods and principles of systematic zoology. McGraw-Hill, New York. 336 pp.
- MCDOWELL, S. 1974. A catalogue of the snakes of New Guinea and the Solomons, with special reference to those in the Bernice P. Bishop Museum 1. *Scolecophidia*. *Journal of Herpetology* 8:1-57.
- PEAKER, M. 1987. Review of Karsen et al. (1986). *The Herpetile* 12(1):36-37.
- POPE, C. H. 1935. The reptiles of China. *Natural History of Central Asia* 10, American Museum of Natural History, New York. 604 pp.
- SIMPSON, G. G. 1961. Principles of animal taxonomy. Columbia University Press, New York. 247 pp.
- TIAN, W. AND Y. JIANG. 1986. Chinese amphibian and reptile identification manual. Science Press, Beijing. 364 pp.
- WALL, F. 1903. A prodromus of the snakes hitherto recorded from China, Japan, and the Loo Choo Islands; with some notes. *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London* 84-102.