

1st November 2002

A DESCRIPTION OF THE SURVIVING SYNTYPE Z.1859.013.545,
CURRENTLY LABELLED AND DESCRIBED AS *Dendroaspis angusticeps*
SMITH, AND HELD AT THE ROYAL MUSEUM OF SCOTLAND,
CHAMBERS STREET, EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND.

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This syntype specimen has been investigated to check the identification before entry into the forthcoming publication "A CHECKLIST FOR AFRICAN SNAKES Vol. 2 THE FAMILY ELAPIDAE (Cobras, Mambas and Allied Species) & THE FAMILY HYDROPHIIDAE (Sea Snakes)".

INTRODUCTION

This specimen was collected by Sir A[ndrew] Smith M.D. and presented to the now RMS on the 5 May 1859. It was at that time named and entered as NMSZ1859.13.545 *Naia angusticeps*, C.G.H. [Cape of Good Hope].

FitzSimons (1937) saw the specimen and noted it as part of the type series of *Dendroaspis angusticeps* Smith. However later FitzSimons (1946) restricted the name *D. angusticeps* to the Green Mamba, distinguishing it from the Black Mamba, *D. polylepis* Gunther by lower scale counts, both dorsally and ventrally.

This was raised by Broadley in a letter to the RMS saying "The ventral count of 267 for the larger 'brown' specimen positively identifies it as a *D. polylepis*. Therefore your syntype of *Dendroaspis angusticeps* is in fact a *D. polylepis*!".

I am not aware that Broadley studied the specimen at the RMS or if he was just basing the identification on FitzSimons (1937) study and resulting scale counts. While I had no doubt that Broadley was correct, I felt that clarification was needed, since I have collected *Dendroaspis angusticeps* with ventral counts of 270.

There is also some debate to who actually received Smiths personal collection of reptiles and the circumstances of the collection being deposited in Edinburgh. I am not going to get into this dispute, only to say that the status and standing of some institutions is calculated by the collections they hold and the source of those collections. If more information is required then there is a letter quoted in full in Kirby (1965) Sir Andrew Smith MD, KCB, His Life, Letters and Works.

MATERIALS

The specimen in question had been disembowelled from the back of the head to the vent. The cut had been made on a single edge between the last dorsal scale and the ventral edge. The hemipenis had been left intact and connected internally to the inside of the vent.

ANALYSIS

Description

Dorsal scale count was taken at mid-body (mid-length between the back of the head and the vent) and was 23.

Ventral scales were 267, as Broadley had said. The largest ventral plate measured 10 mm x 53 mm.

The cloacal was divided.

Subcaudals were paired at 118.

Upper labials were 8, the 3rd and 4th entering the orbit.

Lower labials were 12. (The 1st four were in contact with the anterior sublinguals).

Rostral was visible from above.

Internasals were irregular shape and size but not unusual.

Prefrontals were irregular shape and size but not unusual.

Frontal was present.

Supraocular were present.
Parietal were present and were miss-shaped, the right being far more pointed to the rear than the left.
Loreal were present
Preoculars were 2 (usually 3). The 2nd one was almost unnoticeable due to its reduced size.
Postoculars were 4 (within the range of 2-5)
Prenasal or Postnasal scales were not unusual.
Mental was present.

Colouration

The dorsal surface is brown.
The ventral surface is dark cream with splashes of brown starting at mid-way down the body towards the tail and darkening and getting heavier as it does.
The head was the same muddy brown as the dorsal colouration. The upper labials showed no sign of being lighter than the top of the head.

Size

Since the specimen had been previously disembowelled and the skin may have been stretched the measurement of the body between the back of the head and the vent may be larger than it would have been, but well within the range of either *Dendroaspis angusticeps* or *Dendroaspis polylepis*.
The measurements are as follows:
Snout to vent length is 186 cm.
Tail length from vent to tip is 49 cm.
Width of head from eye to eye is 19 mm.
Tip of snout to the back of the parietal is 40 mm. The eye is 6 mm in diameter.

Conclusion.

Now having seen the specimen and taken all the details into account I can confirm that the specimen Z.1859.013.545, and currently labelled as *Dendroaspis angusticeps* SMITH is in fact a male *Dendroaspis polylepis* GUNTHER as Broadley said.

Acknowledgement

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