

Family Typhlopidae (blind snakes)

Worm Snake

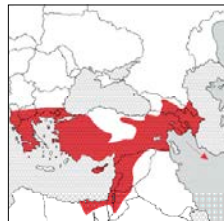
Xerotyphlops vermicularis (Merrem, 1820) (formerly *Typhlops vermicularis*)

Family: Typhlopidae (blind snakes)

Sub-family: Asiatyphlopiinae

F.: *Typhlops vermicularis*

G.: Wurmschlange



Identification Length 18–30 cm, to 36.5 cm, body diameter 2.5–5.5 mm. Morphology recalls that of an earthworm. A blunt head without obvious separation from the body, with minuscule eyes in the form of dark spots on the top of the head. The body is cylindrical, slightly flattened. The whole of the body is covered in small, round, smooth, shiny scales, all more or less of the same size, arranged in 22–24 rows. The short, blunt tail ends in a thorn-shaped caudal scale that

can serve as a fixation point when the animal is moving forward.

Transparent brownish, pink or pale red colour; the belly is brighter, allowing the internal organs, eggs and prey remains in the body to be detected.

Venom Harmless.

Habitat At lower elevations on hillsides and mountain sides; on dry slopes covered with bushes and rocks and covered with sparse grassy vegetation. Also present in Mediterranean garigue



The Worm Snake Typhlops vermicularis is morphologically reminiscent of an earthworm, but it is a snake. Right: note on the close-up the very rounded snout, the vertically elongated rostral plate and the small eyes on the top and at the rear of the head. Left: Péloponnèse (Greece); right: Azerbaijan. P. Geniez.

and rural, agricultural areas, as well as on semi-arid steppe. Occurs from sea level to 1600 m elevation, rarely to 2169 m.

Habits Lives in a system of underground galleries; can often be found by lifting stones. Appears on the surface only rarely and then only at dusk or at night. In spring, often seen under stones. In summer, especially when it is very hot and dry, it disappears deep into the ground, only to reappear at the surface the following spring; it is then impossible to find, even by turning stones. Winter inactivity: 2–6 months, depending on region and elevation.

Diet Especially ants, including their eggs, larvae and nymphs; also other small insects, myriapods and small worms.

Reproduction Oviparous. Lays 2–6 elongated eggs that hatch in late September.

Range The southern Balkans from Albania and southern Bulgaria as far as Greece, including the Aegean Sea islands; farther east, the countries boarding the eastern Mediterranean from Turkey as far as northeastern Egypt and including Cyprus, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel. In central Asia, its range continues from Transcaucasia to northwestern Afghanistan.

Geographic variation *Xerotyphlops vermicularis* is a monotypic species belonging to a genus composed of just four species, occurring in Asia, Europe and Africa. This genus belongs to the sub-family Asiatyphlopinae.

Israeli Worm Snake

Letheobia simonii (Boettger, 1879) (formerly *Rhinotyphlops simoni*)

Family: Typhlopidae (blind snakes)

Sub-family: Afrotyphlopinae

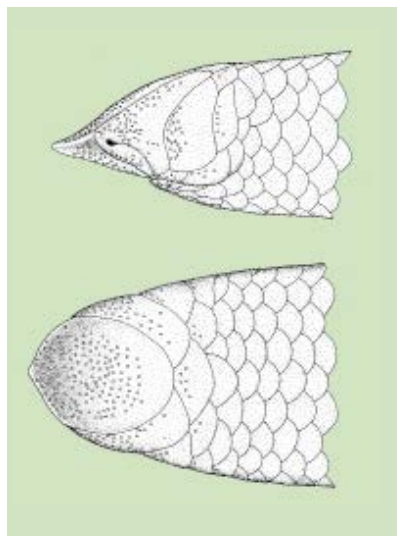
F.: Typhlops d'Israël

G.: Israelische wurmschlange



Identification Minuscule snake (16–24 cm in length); burrowing, wormlike; flesh pink or red-pink in colour; extremely slim (2 or 3 mm in diameter), with hardly visible, minuscule eyes hidden under a large ocular plate. Very small head, indistinct from body, is an orange or slightly yellowish colour. Remarkably

conical, pointed snout, with a flattened, sharp front edge. Rarely large rostral plate extends from the first supralabial to the nostril. One large preocular (which is not as large as the nasal plate), which is in contact with the 2nd and 3rd supralabials; the prefrontal plate and the supraocular scales are larger than the body scales;



Letheobia simonii is a minuscule, wormlike snake. Its very strange head is shaped like a flute mouthpiece. As seen in the diagram, the eyes are not visible as they are located completely under the large, vertical ocular plate situated towards the back of the head. The nostrils could be taken for eyes. Note as well the enormous frontal plate that covers nearly the whole of the head. Talbi.

large undivided ocular plate; 2 or 3 postoculars; 3 or 4 supralabials on each side. The tail is short (less than 2% of the total length) hardly longer than wide (about 4 mm). The body scales are small and shiny, essentially all the same size, including those of the belly (no differentiated ventral plates) and arranged in 20–22 longitudinal rows; 403–488 transverse rows of scales along the body; the anal scute is undivided, and there is no caudal spine.

Venom Harmless.

Habitat Mediterranean regions. Soft and damp soils in wadis and near urban areas; also in cultivated areas and gardens.

Habits Almost unknown. Lives underground in soft soils, between plant roots and under stones.

Diet Essentially ants, including their eggs and larvae, but also other small insects and small spiders.

Reproduction Oviparous; the female lays a few elongated eggs.

Range Israel, northwestern Jordan, Lebanon and western Syria.

Geographic variation *Letheobia simonii* is a monotypic species.

The genus *Letheobia* contains 31 species occurring principally in Africa and belongs to the sub-family Afrotropilopinae.

Southeastern Turkey Worm Snake

Letheobia episcopus (Franzen and Wallach, 2002)
(formerly *Rhinotyphlops episcopus*)

Family: Typhlopidae (blind snakes)

Sub-family: Afrotyphlopinae

F.: Typhlops de Turquie, Typhlops de Bischoff

G.: Südosttürkische Wurmschlange



Identification Closely related to *Letheobia simonii*, but for the present known only from southeastern Turkey. A small wormlike snake that is a little larger than *L. simonii* (total length 25–33 cm). Eyes invisible externally. Conical snout, pointed and angular in front like that of *L. simonii*. Large, undivided nasal plate; the ocular plate is often divided into 2 or 3 narrow scales (undivided in *L. simonii*); 5 or 6 postoculars; 4 labials on each side; 20 rows of scales at mid-body. The number of transverse rows of scales around the body is larger

than in *L. simonii* and diagnostic: 544–595 (compared to 403–488). No spine on the tail. The body colour is pink or orange-pink, with a slightly vermiculated pigmentation on the back; snout yellowish.

Venom Harmless.

Habitat Dry areas undisturbed by humans with grassy vegetation, many rocks and isolated shrubs (oaks, terebinth, mastic, olive). Soil often brown loam on limestone karst. Semi-arid climate with rain in winter but little or no precipitation in summer.



Southeastern Turkey Worm Snake
Letheobia episcopus
is a tiny, blind, burrowing snake discovered in 2002. Franzen.

Habits Hardly known. Lifestyle like that of the closely related *Letheobia simonii*: underground, in soft soil, between bush roots or under stones.

Diet Unknown; probably small insects such as ants, their eggs and their larvae, and small worms.

Reproduction Unknown but probably oviparous.

Range For the present, known from a small area in southeastern Turkey, around Halfeti, in the Upper Euphrates and near Şanlıurfa, at elevations between 500 and 640 m.

Brahminy Worm Snake

Indotyphlops braminus (Daudin, 1803) (formerly *Ramphotyphlops braminus*)

Family: Typhlopidae (blind snakes)

Sub-family: Asiatyphlopinae

F.: Serpent aveugle des pots de fleurs or Typhlops de Brahma; **G.:** Brahmanen-Wurmschlange



Identification Small, wormlike snake that resembles the Worm Snake *Xerotyphlops vermicularis* but is slightly slimmer and of more variable colour, often dark violet-brown, ash-grey or even pale blue. The length when adult, 13–20.3 cm, is less than that of the Worm Snake (it is one of the smallest snakes in the world). The body scales, all almost the same size, are arranged in 20 rows around the body (22–24 in the Worm Snake) and in 292–368 transverse rows, depending on the individual. The narrow rostral plate and the 2 nasal plates overhang the mouth to form a sort of rounded shovel that allows the snake to burrow in the soil. Nasal plate completely divided by a furrow (only partially in the Worm Snake); the nasal furrow is in contact with the preocular (in contact with the 2nd supralabial in the Worm Snake).

Venom Harmless.

Habitat In Egypt, the Brahminy Worm Snake was found in newly constructed urban sites in the desert planted with tropical gardens and regularly watered lawns. In the Canary Islands, this species has been found in flowerpots. Unlike other species of Typhlopidae and species of Leptotyphlopidae of the Western Palaearctic, it avoids arid areas and desert.

Habits A burrowing, nocturnal species that lives in burrows dug in light, more or less humid soil; in gardens and plant containers in urban areas. It is found within clumps of roots, under stones, in heaps of vegetation or leaf litter. The best chance of finding one is to look under flowerpots, where it often shelters, or in watered lawns or gardens in hot countries; at night, look in over-watered areas.



Indotyphlops braminus. Above: a juvenile; below: an adult darting its minuscule whitish tongue. Aguadulce (Ameria province, Spain). Rodríguez Luque.

Diet Small invertebrates such as ants, termites, worms and caterpillars.

Reproduction The Brahminy Worm Snake is very remarkable in the fact that it is one of only two species of snakes in the world known to be parthenogenetic. Without having to mate with a male, females lay 1–18 eggs that all hatch into females. Males are unknown and probably do not exist.

Range The Brahminy Worm Snake is considered to be the species of terrestrial snake with the most extensive range in the world, due to the fact that it can reproduce from a single individual and the ease with which it can be accidentally transported in flowerpots. Its natural origin is uncertain, but it is probably on the Indian subcontinent and Sri Lanka. Because it is easily transported in soil (particularly in that of flowerpots), it has been introduced into sub-Saharan Africa, in other parts of Southeast Asia, northern Australia, islands in the Indian and South Pacific oceans, the southern United States and to Hawaii, Mexico and Guatemala. In the area covered by this book (where it has also been introduced), since 2004 it has been reported from the Arabian Peninsula; Kuwait; Egypt, around Cairo and in the Sinai; northwestern Libya; Grand Canaria (Canary Islands) and Madeira (Portugal). In 2011 and 2012 the species was found on mainland Spain at Aguadulce, Almeria province, by Francisco Rodríguez Luque. It is probable that new sites will soon be found in warmer parts of the Mediterranean region.

Geographic variation *Indotyphlops braminus* is a monotypic species. The genus *Indotyphlops* contains 22 species, all of Southeast Asian origin, and belongs to the sub-family Asiatyphlopinae, as does *Xerotyphlops vermicularis*.

Family Leptotyphlopidae (slender blind snakes)

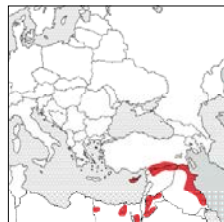
Hook-billed Blind Snake

Myriopholis macrorhyncha (Jan, 1860) (formerly *Leptotyphlops macrorhynchus*)

Family: Leptotyphlopidae (slender blind snakes)

F.: Leptotyphlops à bec crochu

G.: Hackensnabel-Schlankblindschlange



Identification Minuscule, burrowing, wormlike, very thin (2–3 mm diameter) snake with a short tail (9–10% of the total length). 17–28 cm long. Minuscule eyes appear as points hidden under the very large ocular scale. The upper part of the snout is curved forward, giving the head a hooked appearance; the upper mandible is obviously longer than the lower. The mouth is on the underside. The rostral plate is concave in its lower part, and the large nasal

plates are divided in their lower part, where the minuscule nostrils are located. The ocular plates are very enlarged, their lower edge located between 2 supralabials, the front one very small. The lower part of these 3 scales (rostral, nasal and ocular) is in direct contact with the mouth. The occipital plate is undivided. The body is cylindrical, slightly flattened. The body scales are smooth and, for most, identical around the entire body (no large ventral plates), arranged in 14



*The Hook-billed Blind Snake *Myriopholis macrorhyncha*, wormlike and very slim, obtains its name from the curved, hooked shape of the snout. Here, several juveniles from southeast Turkey. Göçmen.*



Myriopholis macrorhyncha, in southwestern Turkey. Note the obviously prominent “beak”, which is, however, less hooked than that of the closely related *M. algeriensis* (following species). P. Geniez and A. Teynié.

rows at mid-body; 300–490 rings of scales from the head to the anal scute; 43–53 rings of scales along the tail arranged in 10 rows at mid-tail. A pale, translucent pink, red or yellowish-brown colour.

Venom Harmless.

Habitat Low-lying arid or desert regions with sparse vegetation, stones and, locally, slight humidity. Sometimes near human habitations, in oases and uncultivated gardens, but also in wilder or desertlike areas.

Habits Little known. Nocturnal. Lives under stones and tufts of vegetation or in the root systems of trees or bushes. Avoids direct sunlight.

Diet Small insects such as ants and termites.

Reproduction Oviparous.

Range Northeastern Africa, Arabian Peninsula, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, southeastern Turkey, Iraq, western and southern Iran, to the east as far as western Pakistan and south as far as Kenya and northern Tanzania.

Geographic variation Since the populations in northwestern Africa have been considered to belong to another species, *Myriopholis algeriensis*, and since *M. macrorhyncha bilmaensis* is considered to be synonymous with *M. algeriensis*, *M. macrorhyncha* is considered to be a monotypic species (without any subspecies). However, the status of the *hamulirostris* taxon, present in Iran and also probably in Turkey, needs to be clarified as it may concern a subspecies, or maybe even a separate species.

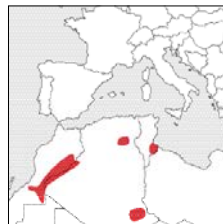
Algerian Hook-billed Blind Snake

Myriopholis algeriensis (Jacquet, 1895) (formerly *Leptotyphlops algeriensis*)

Family: Leptotyphlopidae (slender blind snakes)

F.: Leptotyphlops d'Algérie

G.: Algerische hackensnabel-Schlankblindschlange



Identification Minuscule, wormlike snake, closely related to the Hook-billed Blind Snake but with an even more pronounced hooked “beak”. An inhabitant of the Sahara zone and with a more western distribution, centred on northwestern Africa. A pale pink colour.

Venom Harmless.

Habitat Low- to medium-elevation desert with sparse vegetation, stones and, sometimes but not always, damp areas here and there.

Habits Nocturnal and burrowing. Lives under stones and tufts of vegetation and in the root system of shrubs. Avoids direct sunlight. Sometimes comes to the surface – for example, when the ground has been watered.



Algerian Hook-billed blind Snake *Myriopholis algeriensis*. Note the even more hooked snout compared to that of *M. macrorhyncha*, forming a protruding “beak”. Morocco. P. Geniez.

Diet Little known, but most probably small insects, ants and termites, for example.

Reproduction Oviparous.

Range Northwestern African deserts; in the area covered by this book: southern Morocco, including the northern part of the Atlantic Sahara, desert steppe in Algeria as well as the Ajjer massif in the extreme southeastern part of the country, and southern Tunisia. Also present in Mauritania, northern Mali and northeast Niger. It probably occurs in Libya.

Geographic variation *Myriopholis algeriensis* is considered to be a monotypic species.



Close-up of *Myriopholis algeriensis*. Morocco. P. Geniez.

Cairo Earthsnake

Myriopholis cairi (Duméril and Bibron, 1844) (formerly *Leptotyphlops cairi*)

Family: Leptotyphlopidae (slender blind snakes)

F.: *Leptotyphlops du Caire*

G.: Ägyptische Schlankblindschlange



Identification Minuscule, wormlike snake, 15–25.3 cm in total length for a diameter of 2–3 mm. The constantly darted forked tongue immediately distinguishes this snake from a worm. Rounded snout much less protruding than in *Myriopholis macrorhyncha* and *M. algeriensis*. Minuscule eyes covered by a large ocular scale. A supraocular scale located on each side. The ocular plate extends to the corner of the mouth; it is located between 2 supralabials, the front one of which is very small (less than a quarter of that of the rear supralabial). Divided occipital plate (undivided in *M.*

macrorhyncha and *M. algeriensis*). The body scales are smooth, translucent and shiny, all nearly the same around the body and arranged in 14 rows of scales at mid-body, and 267–364 transverse rows from the rear of the head to the tail tip. Short tail (1.2–2.0 cm) that finishes in a sharp point by the terminal scale.

Upperparts pale pink or pale purple-brown, whitish belly.

Venom Harmless.

Habitat Needs a certain amount of ground humidity. In the Nile Valley, often occurs near human habitations, in gardens and agricultural zones



Cairo Earthsnake *Myriopholis cairi*. D. Fuchs.

and at field edges. Lives under stones, between roots of bushes, in soft ground and small mammal burrows.

Habits Little known. Nocturnal. These slender blind snakes may be found in February, March or April at night, near the soil surface, even on the soil. Avoids direct sunlight. Actively digs in and turns over the soil. Goes into water voluntarily and swims quite well.

Diet Small insects.

Reproduction Oviparous.

Range Within the scope of this book, occurs only in the Nile Valley in Egypt; also in Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Niger.

Geographic variation *Myriopholis cairi* is considered to be a monotypic species.