

Two new members of the *Lerista nichollsi* complex (Lacertilia: Scincidae)

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Abstract

Both species come from the arid mid-west of Western Australia. One, *Lerista gascoynensis*, is nearest to *L. nichollsi*, which it replaces in much of the middle and upper Gascoyne River valley. The other, *L. varia*, is nearest to *L. connivens*, which it replaces in much of the Shark Bay region.

Introduction

In a revision of the *Lerista nichollsi* complex (Storr 1984), I hesitated to include within *L. uniduo* three specimens that agreed with it in supraciliary formula but differed in being larger, relatively stouter and more boldly patterned. Recently G. Harold and D. Mead-Hunter collected additional specimens of the second form and demonstrated its sympatry with *L. uniduo*, which necessitated its description as a new species.

In the past (Storr 1972, 1984) specimens of a small, variably patterned *Lerista* from the Shark Bay region were identified as *L. lineopunctulata* (26725, 33373) or *L. connivens* (71090, 81340-1, 81383) according as the dorsal and upper lateral stripes were weakly or more strongly developed. Long series recently collected by P.G. Kendrick have shown that this *Lerista* is distinct from both *L. lineopunctulata* and *L. connivens* and it is herein described as new.

Systematics

Lerista gascoynensis sp. nov.

Figure 1

Holotype

R55971 in Western Australian Museum, collected by T.M.S. Hanlon and M. Peterson on 30 January 1977 at 16 km S Gascoyne Junction, Western Australia, in 25° 10' S, 115° 12' E.

Paratypes

North-West Division (WA)

Winderie (87616); 17 km SSW Gascoyne Junction (87565-74) and 16 km S (55975-6) and 20 km NNE (87617-21); 14 km SW Lyons River HS (87575-9, 87587-94); 2 km SE Dairy Creek HS (87645); 10 km SE Mt James HS (84217-9); 1 km E Mt Clere HS (84809).

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Diagnosis

A medium-sized member of the *L. nichollsi* complex with immovable eyelids, three supraciliaries (first and second separated by first supraocular) and narrow vertebral stripe. Distinguishable from *L. uniduo* by its greater size (maximum SVL 70 mm, *v.* 59), relatively stouter body and bolder pattern, and from both subspecies of *L. nichollsi* by its fewer supraciliaries (four in *L. n. nichollsi* and *L. n. petersoni*).

Description

Snout-vent length (mm): 36-70 (N 37, mean 57.6). Tail length (% SVL): 85-96 (N 10, mean 91.0).

Nasals in short to long contact. Supraoculars 3 with first two contacting frontal (N 36) or 4 with two (1). Supraciliaries 1 + 2 (except for 4 on one side of one specimen), last much the smallest. Loreals 2, second much the smaller and fused to prefrontal in five specimens. Presuboculars 1 (N 1) when first fused to second loreal, 2 (31) or 3 (5). Upper labials 6. Nuchals 1 (N 5), 2 (26) or 3 (6). Midbody scale rows 20 (N 34), 21 (1) or 22 (2). Lamellae under longer toe 10-14 (N 37, mean 11.8).

Coloration in alcohol. Dorsally brownish white except for brown edges and blotches on head shields and for narrow vertebral stripe (consisting of two rows

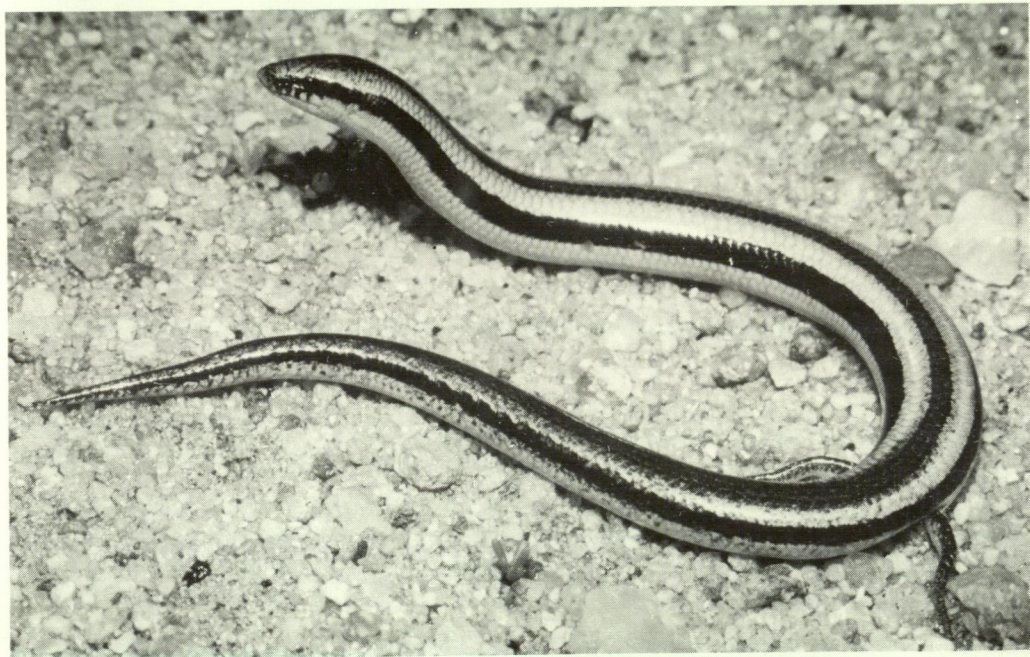


Figure 1 A paratype of *Lerista gascoynensis*, photographed by G. Harold.

of squarish blackish brown or dark brown spots, the space between them dark or pale brown). Broad blackish brown or dark brown upper lateral stripe, one and a half to two scales wide on body but narrowing on head. Lips vertically barred with blackish brown or dark brown. Ventrolateral and ventral surfaces whitish, except for brownish grey under toes.

Distribution

Interior of mid-western Western Australia, in the valley of the Gascoyne River from Winderie east to Mt Clerc. See Figure 2.

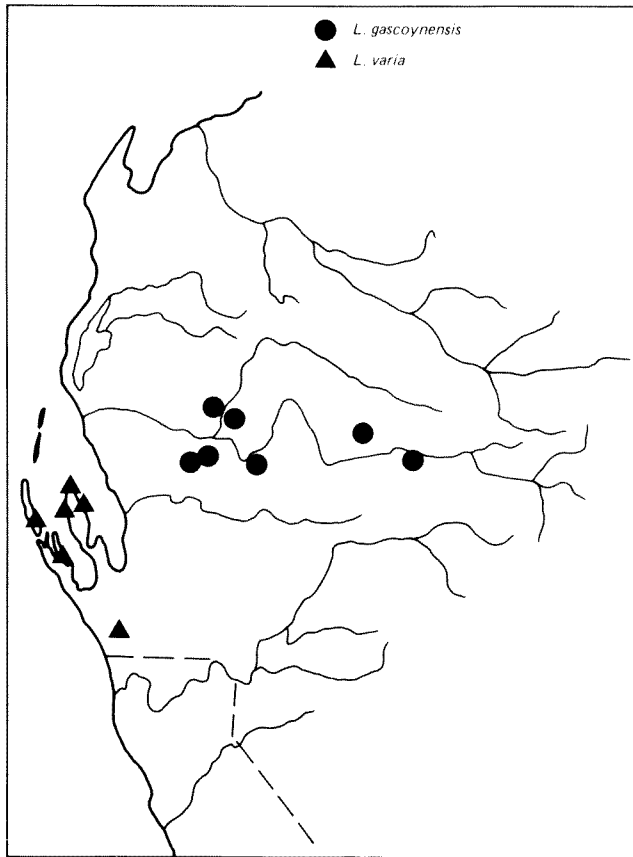


Figure 2 Map of mid-western Western Australia showing location of specimens of *Lerista gascoynensis* and *L. varia*.

Remarks

It was originally thought possible (Storr 1984) that *L. gascoynensis* was an eastern variant of *L. uniduo*. However, typical *L. uniduo* has been subsequently

collected at 30 km SW Glenburgh (87626) and elsewhere within the range of *L. gascoynensis*. Actually, *L. gascoynensis* is very like *L. n. nichollsi*, from which it differs only in the fewer supraciliaries. As it appears to be allopatric to both *L. nichollsi* and *L. n. petersoni*, *L. gascoynensis* may eventually prove to be a subspecies of *L. nichollsi*.

Lerista varia sp. nov.

Figure 3

Holotype

R81341 in Western Australian Museum, collected by G. Harold and C.D. Winton on 18 June 1981 at Denham, Western Australia, in 25° 55' S, 113° 32' E.

Paratypes

North-West Division (WA)

Cape Peron (33373); Monkey Mia (89370-1, 91196-234); Denham (81340, 89372-3) and 6 km NE (81383) and 2 km NE (71090) and 2 km N (71081, 71083-9); Dirk Hartog I. (44549); 10 km S Useless Loop (26725); 17 km WSW Cooloomia (66371).

Diagnosis

A moderately large member of the *L. nichollsi* complex with movable eyelids, differing from *L. connivens* by its highly variable but generally much weaker pattern and by its fewer midbody scale rows (mostly 20, *v.* mostly 22); it is also smaller, has a darker dorsal ground colour and often has four (rather than only two) series of black dorsal spots. Unstriped specimens superficially similar to young *L. lineopunctulata*, but distinguishable by fewer supraciliaries (four with first much wider than high, *v.* five with first not wider than high), longer hindleg (12-18 % of SVL, *v.* 6-13 %), more numerous lamellae under longer toe (6-12, seldom fewer than 9; *v.* 4-11, seldom more than 9), and invariably having two toes (often only one in northern *lineopunctulata*).

Description

Snout-vent length (mm): 31-77 (N 57, mean 52.8). Tail length (% SVL): 64-87 (N 7, mean 79.1).

Nasals in short to long contact. Supraoculars 3 with first two contacting frontal (N 55) or 2 with one (2). Supraciliaries 4, first much the widest and last much the smallest. Loreals 2 (N 55) or 1 (1) when fused to each other. Presuboculars 2. Upper labials 6. Nuchals 1 (N 11), 2 (37) or 3 (2). Midbody scale rows 18 (N 5), 19 (1), 20 (36) or 22 (1). Lamellae under longer toe 6-12 (N 48, mean 9.8).

Coloration in alcohol. Head suffused or blotched with greyish brown. Back and tail brown or pale brown with or without a wide but usually indistinct stripe that encloses 0, 2 or 4 series of faint to moderately distinct brown spots. Upper lateral stripe narrow, indistinct or absent on body (rarely one scale wide and fairly sharp-edged, but usually narrower or represented only by dark edges to upper lateral scales), usually better developed on head as a loreo-temporal stripe. Lower lateral and ventral surfaces whitish except for brown vertical barring of lips and pale greyish-brown suffusion on chin.



Figure 3 Holotype of *Lerista varia*, photographed by G. Harold.

Distribution

Shark Bay region of Western Australia: Peron Peninsula, Dirk Hartog I., Edel Land and further south in the hinterland of the Zuytdorp Cliffs. See Figure 2.

Remarks

L. varia overlaps broadly with *L. lineopunctulata*. However, the insular and peninsular populations of *L. varia* lie outside the range of *L. connivens*, and it was at first believed that *L. varia* could be regarded as a subspecies of *L. connivens*, but this was precluded by the discovery of a specimen (66371) from well within the range of *L. connivens*.

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References

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