



Description of a new species of *Eumeces* (Sauria: Scincidae) from Pakistan

RAFAQAT MASROOR

Zoological Sciences Division, Pakistan Museum of Natural History, Garden Avenue, Shakerparian, Islamabad 44000, Pakistan.
E-mail: rafaqatmasroor1@yahoo.com

Abstract

A new species of skink, *Eumeces cholistanensis* **sp. nov.** is described from a very remote area of Cholistan Desert, Bahawalpur district, Punjab Province of Pakistan. The major diagnostic characters of the new species include the presence of 7 dark brown stripes separated by alternating light narrower stripes, extending on to the tail, two azygous postmentals, 54–57 rows of paired, widened middorsal scales, 64–67 scales from postmental to anal scale, absence of postnasal and intercalary scales between subdigital lamellae. This skink, being striped, is sharply different from all of its congeners in several morphological characteristics, a reason that warrants its recognition as a separate species.

Key words: Scincidae, *Eumeces cholistanensis* **sp. nov.**, new species, taxonomy, Cholistan, Pakistan

Introduction

In a recent study by Carranza *et al.* (2008), they showed that *Eumeces* is seemingly paraphyletic, with *E. algeriensis* being more closely related to *Scincopus* and *Scincus* than to *E. schneiderii*, although the support is not very high. Earlier, Schmitz *et al.* (2004) corrected the nomenclatural error of Griffith *et al.* (2000) and restored the genus name *Eumeces* to the *schneiderii* species group (because this group contains the type species of the genus *Eumeces*), placing “*Novoeumeces*” into its synonymy, and also proposed a new generic name, *Pariocela* Fitzinger, 1843, for all North American skinks of *Eumeces* sensu lato. Both Brandley *et al.* (2005) and Smith (2005) later replaced the name *Pariocela* with the older available genus name *Plestiodon* Duméril and Bibron, 1839.

Taylor (1935) recognized six species within the *schneiderii* species-group: *E. algeriensis* (Peters, 1864), *E. blythianus* (Anderson, 1871), *E. pavimentatus* (I. Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire, 1827), *E. princeps* (Eichwald, 1839), *E. schneiderii* (Daudin, 1802) and *E. zarudnyi* (Nikolsky, 1899). Lieb (1985) tentatively recognized four species: *E. algeriensis*, *E. pavimentatus*, *E. princeps* and *E. schneiderii*. However, Mertens (1946) gave *E. zarudnyi* and *E. blythianus* subspecific status within widely distributed Saharo-Sindhian *E. schneiderii*.

The Pakistani members of the genus *Eumeces* are represented by the *taeniolatus* species-group, with a single species *Eurylepis taeniolatus* Blyth, 1854 and the *schneiderii* species-group represented by three species namely *Eumeces blythianus* (Anderson, 1871), *Eumeces zarudnyi* (Nikolsky, 1899) and *Eumeces indothalensis* (Khan and Khan, 1997).

I here report the discovery of a new species of *Eumeces* from the Cholistan Desert (Fig. 1), which lies on the eastern side of the Indus River and the southern and southeastern side of Sutlej River. This region is the northwestern limit of Thar or Great Indian Desert and is characterized by plains of gently undulating sand hills, generally below 150 m in elevation. Archeological evidence shows that the region was better watered in the past, through the flow of historic Hakra River, now a dry watercourse. This desert comprises 2.6 million hectares (FAO, 1993; Akbar *et al.*, 1996) and has a length of about 480 km, while the width varies between 32 and 192 km (Khan, 1987; Chaudhry, 1992). Based on the topography, soil and vegetation, the whole Cholistan