NOTES ON SCOLECOPHIDIANS (BLIND SNAKES)

REPTILIA - SERPENTES OF IRAQ

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ABSTRACT

This work includes the geographical distribution, variation and notes for the habitat of Iraqi blind snakes Leptotyphlops macrorhynchus, Typhlops braminus, and Typhlops vermicularis. A key was also given for the identification of these three snakes.

INTRODUCTION

Scolecophidians (Reptilia-Serpentes) are small, highly specialized burrowing harmless snakes covered with shiny equal sized scales. Their eyes are visible just as dark spots beneath the enlarged head scales. Literature concerning blind snakes of Iraq are few. The literature includes works depending either on a single specimen (Corkill, 1932, Reed and Marx, 1959) or on literature only (Khalaf, 1959, Mahdi and George, 1969). Therefore the known species in Iraq are Leptotyphlops macrorhynchus (Jan), Typhlops braminus (Duadin) and Typhlops vermicularis Merrem.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

A total of fifty specimens were collected from different parts of Iraq, 4 specimens of *T.braminus*, 21 Specimens of *T.vermicularas* and 24 specimens of *Leptotyphlops macrorhynchus* by different ways of collection either by putting a big jar at ground level in a place suspected the snakes to be found there, or by digging the ground. Data on habitat and feeding were taken immediately after catching the specimens.

Studied specimens were kept at Iraq Natural History Museum.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Family: Leptotyphlopidae
Genus: Leptotyphlops (Fitzinger) Leptotyphlops macrorhynchus (Jan).

Distribution: Peramagroon - (alt. 2800m), Halabja (Sulaimaniya), Baquba, Kirkuk, Arbil, Baghdad, Falluja, Kut, Nasiriya, Amara (Fig. 1).

Measurements: 14 mid body scales 382 - 391 vertebral scales. Snout hooked, pre-oral portion concave inferiorly. Supraocular present. Ocular bordering the lip, separated from the lower nasal by a single labial nasal completely divided.

Habitat and feeding. It is usually found in the moist places under rocks or decayed leaves in shaded places. Stomach contents of all of them included mainly small insects and insect larvae.
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Discussion. The variation exhibited by these specimens is within the usual range of variation known for this species. Most of them are due to the sexual dimorphism. The short-tailed specimens were females while the long-tailed ones were males. It seems also that mature females are relatively fatter than males and juveniles. This species is the most widespread in Iraq compared with the other two snakes since it was recorded from north, middle and south of the country. Family

Family: Typhlopidae
Genus: Typhlops (Schneider)
Typhlops braminus (Duadin)

Distribution: Baghdad, Basrah

Measurements: midbody with 20 scale rows. Preocular present, in contact with 2nd and 3rd labials. Nasal divided, nasal cleft preceeding from the preocular.

Habitat and feeding: All specimens were found inside old houses of Baghdad. Stomach of one of them contained mainly termites.

Discussion. This is regarded the 2nd report of this species in Iraq since Corkill (1932) examined only one specimen caught from Basrah. He was not certain of its identification.

He thought that it was accidentally introduced through Basrah port by ships. Present specimens were collected from Baghdad in the middle of Iraq. We believe that Corkill’s suggestion was inadequate since it is unreason able to assume that such a small, blind, sluggish and burrower snake could extend its range about 600 Km. Within 50 years.
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*Typhlops vermicularis* (Merrem);

Distribution: Halabja - Chemchamal (Sulaimaniya)
Baghdad. Fig. 1 Fig. 2.

Measurements: midbody with 22 - 24 scale rows 388-
430 vertebral scales. Rostral 30% width of the head.
Nasals incompletely divided. Nasal cleft preceding
from the 2nd labial. Nasals almost meet behind the
rostral. Four supralabials. Preocular contacts 2nd
and 3rd labials. Tail a little longer than wide. Total
length 129 - 320mm Width 2.8-8mm. Width contained
46 times in total length.

Habitat and feeding: One specimen was found near
a stream in a relatively loose soil. Others were collected
either by digging the ground or under the rock, some
were collected at night while coming toward a light
source. Stomach contains ants and other insect larvae.

Discussion: This snake is the largest one among
the Iraqi blind snakes. It is common in north and
north-east of Iraq. The variations exhibited by Iraqi
specimens are in size and vertebral scales. It might
be due to age of the specimens e.g. Total length 129
vertebral scale 382 - 391. T.L 220. vertebral scales 412
T.L. 320. vertebral scale 430.

All specimens have a pinkish colour except two specimens
from Ainzala. Mosul, province which have dark brown
colour and 478 vertebral scales although its length is
240mm which fall in the same range of other specimens.
It looks like Russian specimens described by Terentev &
Chernov (1949). However, all specimens have 22-24 scales
around the body.
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The three known scolecodonians in Iraq can be distinguished as follows: Scales in 14 longitudinal rows at midbody, dorsum pink or brownish pink .........

............. Leptotyphlops macrorhynchus
Scales in 20 longitudinal rows at midbody, dorsum blackish brown .................

............... Typhlops braminus
Scales in 22-24 longitudinal rows at midbody, dorsum pinkish brown often tinged with pink or yellow ...................

Typhlops vermicularis

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LITERATURE CITED


—Terentev, P. V. and Chernov, S. A. 1949 key to amphibians and reptiles. 3rd. enlarged edition. Sovetskaya Nauka Moskva

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ملاحظات حول الحياة العمياء في العراق

سامان رضوان القرشي وحسين عباس الملكي

متحف التاريخ الطبيعي - كلية العلوم - جامعة بغداد - بغداد

الخلاصة

يتضمن هذا البحث دراسة للحياة العمياء الثلاثة المسجلة في العراق:

Leptotyphlops macrorhynchus
Typhlops braminus
Typhlops vermicularis

من ناحية التفاعل والتوزيع الجغرافي مع بعض العلاجات من البيئة ومفتاح تصنيف للأنواع الثلاثة.
Summary of distribution of blind snakes of Iraq

- **Leptotyphlops macrorhynchus**
- **Typhlops vermicularis**
- **Typhlops braminus**
Fig 2: Left to right, 1- Leptotyphlops macrorhynchus from Faramagron Mt., Sulaimaniya Province; 2- Typhlops brunus from Baghdad; 3- Typhlops vermicularis from Salah Aldin, Arbil province; 4- Typhlops vermicularis from Ain Zala, Mosul province.