

**NOTES ON SCOLECOPHIDIANS ( BLIND SNAKES )**

**REPTILIA - SERPENTES OF IRAQ**

Saman R. Afrasiab And H.A. Ali

Iraq Natural History Museum, College of  
Science Baghdad University . Baghdad, Iraq

**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 ) .

## Blind snakes of Iraq

### 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 Meuseum .

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Family . *Leptotyphlopidae*

Genus . *Leptotyphlops* ( Fitzinger ) . *Leptotyphlops macrorhynchus* ( Jan ) .

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

Measurements. 14 mid body scales. 382 - 391 vertebral scales. Snout hooked. pre. oral portion concave inferiorly. Supraocular presnt. 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 rocka or decayed leaves in shaded places Stomach contents of all of them included mainly small insects and insect larvae .

**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 beleive that Corkill's suggestion was inadequate since it is unreasonable to assume that such a small, blind, sluggish and burrower snake could extend its range about 600 Km. Within 50 years.

## Blind snakes of Iraq

### *Typhlops vermicularis* ( Merrem ) ;

Distribution ; Halabja - Chemchamal ( Sulaimaniya )  
Salahadin - Arbil Kirkuk. Ainzala ( Mosul ). Duhok.  
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 larvas.

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 scal 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 .

S. R. Afrasiab and H. A. Ali

The three known scolecophidians 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**

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our profound thanks to Dr.A.T. Stimson, of the Reptile section of the British Museum ( Natural History ) for his kind help in confirming the identification of some of our snakes .

#### LITERATURE CITED

- Corkill, A.L. 1932 Snake and snake bite in Iraq. Bailliere. Tindall and Cox London. 51pp.
- Khalaf. K.T. 1959 Reptiles of Iraq with some notes on the amphibians. Ar-Rabitta Press, Baghdad 96 pp.
- Mahdi. N. and Georg. PvV. 1969 Asystematic list of the vertebrates of Iraq. Nat. Hist. Mus. Publ, No. 26, 104pp.
- Reed, A. and Marx. H. 1959 Herpetological collection from north eastern Iraq. Transactions of the Kansas Academy of Science, Vol. 62, No. 1.
- Terentev P.V and Chernov S.A. 1949 key to amphibians and reptiles. 3rd. enlarged edition. Sovetskaya Nauka. Moskva

## Blind snakes of Iraq

ملاحظات حول الحيات العمياء في العراق

سامان روستم الفراسياب وحسين عباس العلي

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 التباير والتوزيع الجغرافي مع اعداء بعض الملاحظات عن البيئة ومفتاح تصنيفي للأنواع الثلاثة .

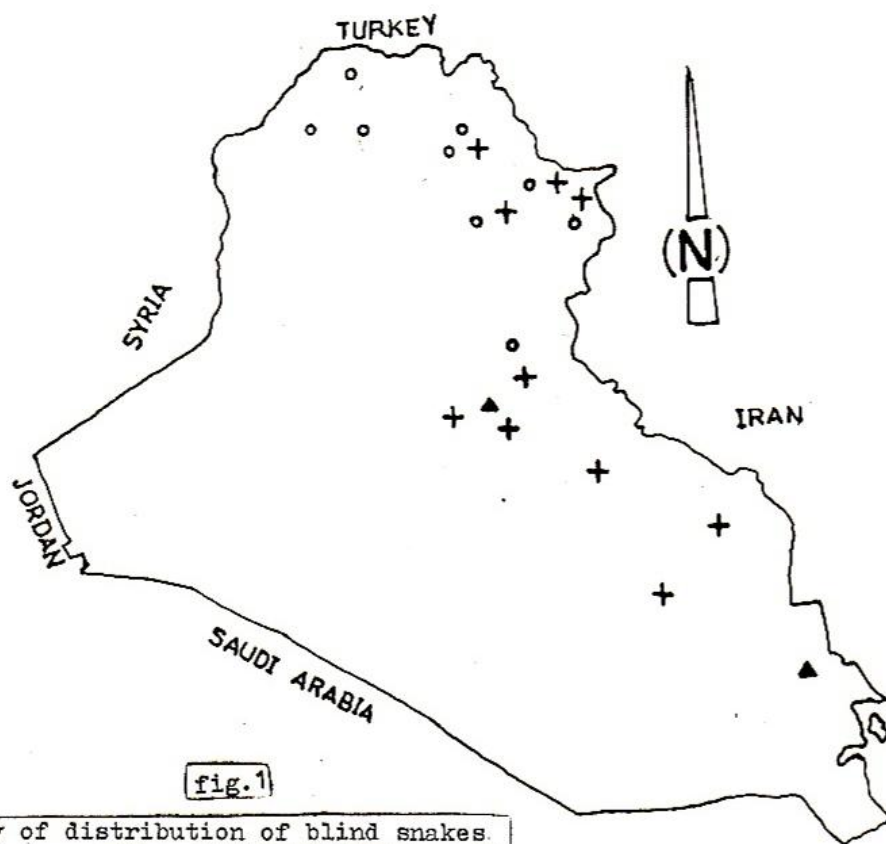


fig.1

Summary of distribution of blind snakes.

of Iraq

- + Leptotyphlops macrorhynchus
- o Typhlops vermicularis
- ▲ Typhlops braminus





S.R.Afrasiab and F.A.Ali

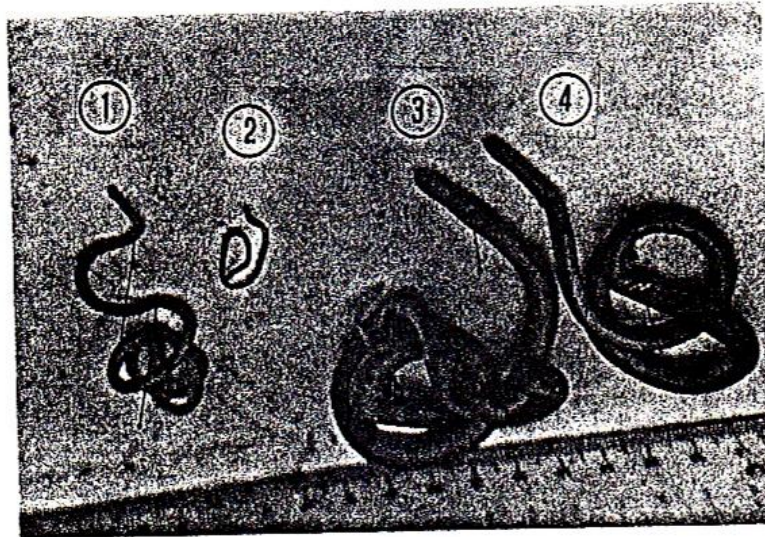


Fig 2: Left to right, 1- Leptotyphlops macrorhynchus From Peramagron Mt., Sulaimaniya Province; 2- Typhlops bra-  
minus from Baghdad; 3- Typhlops vermicularis from Salah Aldin, Arbil province; 4- Typhlops vermicularis from Ain Zala, Mosul province.