A NEW SPECIES OF TANTILLA (SERPENTES: COLUBRIDS) FROM SOUTHEASTERN BRAZIL

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ABSTRACT: We describe a new species of Tantilla (Serpentes: Colubridae) from the highlands ("campos rupestres") of the Serra do Cipó, Minas Gerais, southeastern Brazil. The new species belongs in the T. melanocephala group and is characterized by its uniform reddish orange dorsum with no dark middorsal stripe, a broad pale nuchal band medially divided, and a dark head cap without posterior lateral extensions. Color photographs of adult individuals and illustration of hemipenes of both the new species and T. melanocephala from the Cerrado formation south of the Amazon are provided and comparisons with congeners are made.

Key words: Colubridae; Serpentes; Southeastern Brazil, Serra do Cipó, "Campos rupestres"; Tantilla boipiranga new species; Tantilla melanocephala

The composition of the diverse colubrid genus Tantilla, distributed from North to South America, has changed considerably in the last 30 yr. The changes include descriptions of several new species, change of one subspecies to species level, species reductions to synonymy, species resurrections, and one generic reallocation (e.g., Dixon et al., 2000; Smith et al., 1993; Wilson, 1982, 1987). Wilson (1999) has provided an updated checklist, a key to the species, and information on the distribution of Tantilla. In his study, Wilson (1999) recognized 53 forms as valid species, of which 37 are assigned to 5 species groups. The Tantilla melanocephala group (sensu Wilson, 1987, 1999; Wilson and Mena, 1980) includes seven species distributed in South America, except for T. lempira limited to Honduras and T. melanocephala widely distributed from Guatemala south to Peru, Bolivia, northern Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay. In their extensive work on the T. melanocephala group, Wilson and Mena (1980) includes seven species distributed in South America, except for T. lempira limited to Honduras and T. melanocephala widely distributed from Guatemala south to Peru, Bolivia, northern Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay. In their extensive work on the T. melanocephala group, Wilson and Mena (1980) divided this species in six groups based on the color pattern, which they named "A" to "F." According to their T. melanocephala population system, only two patterns are sympatric ("C" and "D"), both of them occurring in Brazil. Thus, according to Wilson (1999) and Wilson and Mena (1980), T. melanocephala (with two different color patterns) is the only species of the genus recorded from Brazil. We recently found a distinctively colored species of Tantilla, belonging in the T. melanocephala group, in the highlands of the Serra do Cipó, Minas Gerais, southeastern Brazil, described herein as new.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Description of the head color pattern follows the method of Wilson and Mena (1980). Terminology for hemipenial ornamentation follows the method of Wilson (1983). The ventral scale count system follows the wider than long system (Peters, 1964). Color names follow the system of Kornerup and Wanscher (1961). We compared preserved specimens of T. melanocephala from several localities in Brazil (Appendix I) with the four available specimens of the new species. Both hemipenes of the holotype and of one specimen of T. melanocephala were prepared according to the method described by Manzani and Abe (1988). Museum acronyms follow Leviton et al. (1985) except UFMG (Colheca Herpetologica do Departamento de Zoologia, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Minas Gerais, Brasil).

SPECIES DESCRIPTION

Tantilla boipiranga sp. nov.

Holotype.—ZUEC 1840, adult male from the "Serrote" in montane fields