

First record of *Lamprophis  
geometricus* (SCHLEGEL, 1837), on  
the Seychelles Island of La Digue  
(Indian Ocean)

The archipelago of Seychelles consists of 115 islands and is situated northeast of Madagascar. The distance from the central islands to mainland Africa is about 1,300 km in western and approximately 1,000 km to Madagascar in southwestern direction. This geographical isolation enabled the formation of many endemic species of plants and animals.

The distribution of the snake fauna of the archipelago is still insufficiently known. At least one species of naturally occurring endemic snakes exists on Seychelles, the Seychelles Wolf Snake, *Lycognathophis seychellensis* (SCHLEGEL, 1837). It is distributed on the islands of Mahé, Silhouette, Praslin, Aride, La Digue and Frégate (NUSSBAUM 1984; GERLACH & INEICH 2006a). The status of another species, the Seychelles House Snake, *Lamprophis geometricus* (SCHLEGEL, 1837), is still under debate. This snake is documented on the islands of Mahé, Silhouette, Praslin, and Frégate (GUIBÉ



Fig. 1: Dead *Lamprophis geometricus* (SCHLEGEL, 1837). Photo taken on La Digue (Seychelles), October 19, 2013 (Photograph: Richard KOPECZKY).

1958; NUSSBAUM 1984; GERLACH & INEICH 2006b; ROCHA et al. 2009). According to ROCHA et al. (2009), *L. geometricus* was observed in “very high densities” on Frégate Island, including individuals exceeding one meter in length. On Mahé, this nocturnal opistoglyph prefers primary and diverse secondary forest as high as 430 meters elevation (GERLACH & INEICH 2006a) but is also found on open rocky slopes and in villages, very much like its congeners in continental Africa (NUSSBAUM 1984). This snake’s nocturnal activity and preference for dense moist forest may be the reason that it is not as readily recorded as other diurnal reptile species. The third documented snake, the Brahminy Blindsnake or Flowerpot Snake, *Indotyphlops braminus* (DAUDIN, 1803), is an introduced species now living on Mahé, Praslin, La Digue and Frégate (NUSSBAUM 1980, 1984).

SCHLEGEL (1837) designated “Seychelles” as the type locality of *Lamprophis geometricus*. STEJNEGER (1893) examined

four specimens from Mahé and Frégate, showing different color morphs. In 1947, VESEY-FITZGERALD presented an updated list of amphibians and reptiles of the Seychelles, compiling earlier data from BOULENGER (1911) and PARKER (1936). Herein, records from the Seychelles House Snake on Mahé, Frégate and Silhouette were documented; additionally, a voucher specimen from “Exile, Mahé” was mentioned and its rarity noted. HONEGGER (1966) reported the occurrence of the Seychelles House Snake on Mahé and Frégate, confirming earlier records from these islands by RENDAHL (1939). HONEGGER (1966) measured a female from Mahé (total length 790 mm), and based on reports by local people, noted that the snake consumes mice thereby aiding in controlling the rodent population of Mahé, which is why it is respected by the inhabitants. In support of these reports he found fragments of rodents in the digestive tracts of individuals from other islands. GAYMER (1968) confirmed the presence of *L. geometricus* on the

islands of Mahé and Praslin and considered its occurrence on Silhouette and Frégate possible, apparently unaware of earlier documented records in Silhouette by BOULENGER (1911) and PARKER (1936). Furthermore, GAYMER (1968) classified this species as widespread but rare. NUSSBAUM (1984) was the first to list the Seychelles House Snake on all four islands mentioned above. The herpetological collection of the Natural History Museum in Vienna houses a voucher specimen of *L. geometricus* from Mahé, (NHMW 23033), collected during the voyage of the Corvette Frundsberg in 1885.

The taxonomic status of the Seychelles Housesnake is yet debated. DOWLING (1990) considered its distinctiveness from African congeners doubtful and hypothesized that the snake was possibly introduced to the Seychelles such as *I. braminus*. Since *L. geometricus* was not included in the molecular study of African Lamprophiidae by KELLY et al. (2001), its systematic status cannot be evaluated consistently.

The first author found a dead specimen of *L. geometricus* on October, 19, 2013, on the island of La Digue (Fig. 1). Tissue samples were not taken. One may speculate that the snake was killed by a domestic cat as there were some small but deep wounds or maybe by a human. The snake was about 85 cm long and typically colored. The specimen was discovered at 4°22.014' S / 55°50.193 E (WGS 84 datum), next to the highest point of the small road, that leads from the center of the island to the southeastern coast. Dense rain forest surrounds both sides of the road.

This new island record of *L. geometricus* shows that La Digue is inhabited by all three snake species known from the Seychelles.

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