

Scientific note

New record of the endangered snake *Boaedon geometricus* confirms its occurrence on the Seychelles Island of La Digue

(Serpentes, Lamprophiidae)

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The Seychelles House Snake *Boaedon geometricus* (Schlegel, 1837) is morphologically rather similar to several African species and its origin and taxonomic status (either endemic to the Seychelles or introduced from Africa) were uncertain until recently when molecular studies demonstrated its distinctness from the African species and placement in the genus *Boaedon* (Hallermann et al. 2020). *Boaedon geometricus* is listed as “Endangered” on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (Gerlach & Ineich 2021) and has long been known from the Seychelles Islands of Mahé, Praslin, Silhouette and Frégate (Nussbaum 1984, Rocha et al. 2009). However, it was only discovered on the Island of La Digue on 19 October 2013 when a dead specimen was found near a small road in the south of this island (Kopieczky & Gemel 2016). Since then apparently no further records have been published or documented.

More than eight years after this first record, we found an adult individual of this primarily nocturnal and terrestrial snake (Fig. 1) in the leaf litter on the forest floor near Grande Anse in the south of La Digue Island on a sunny morning (8:15 am) of 22 December 2021 (04.37054° S, 55.84438° E, ca. 30 m a.s.l.). After taking photos (Fig. 1) and videos (Supplementary Video 1) we released the snake at the place of capturing. The dense rainforest around the locality included a variety of tree species, palms and ferns. Parts of the surrounding forest floor as well as some granitic boulders and trees were covered with obviously introduced *Epipremum* plants. In the same habitat we observed many diurnal skinks (*Trachylepis sechellensis* and *Pamelaescincus gardineri*), which may serve as potential food for the house snakes although limited data suggest that the species prefers mice (see Kopieczky & Gemel 2016). Another excursion to the locality in the late afternoon and the early night on 23 December 2021 did not reveal any further snake record.

The new locality is approximately at 750 m air distance from the record of Kopieczky & Gemel (2016) and the new observation suggests that a population of this species exists at least in the south of La Digue or even on the whole island. However, it remains unknown if *B. geometricus* has been overlooked on La Digue in previous surveys (e.g., Nussbaum 1984, Rocha et al. 2009) or if it has established on the island only recently. In the latter case a spreading of the snake over the island could result in a decreasing abundance of the terrestrial skink populations.



Fig. 1. Seychelles House Snake (*Boaedon geometricus*) on La Digue Island.

Supplementary Video 1: YouTube video taken by F. Glaw, available at: <https://youtu.be/spQAAfiQA0E>.

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