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Lepidoblepharis sanctaemartae (RUTHVEN, 1916), a lizard new to the Venezuelan fauna

Sixteen species of Dwarf Geckos of the genus *Lepidoblepharis* are currently recognized (AVILA-PIRES 2001). This group of neotropical lizards occurs in Central America from Nicaragua to Panamá, in South America on both sides of the Andes of Colombia and Ecuador, in Amazonian lowlands of Peru and Brazil, and in Falcón State in northwestern Venezuela (MARKEZICH & TAPHORN 1994; AVILA-PIRES 2001).

During field work along the Río Guasare, Sierra de Perijá, Estado Zulia, Venezu-

ela, at elevations between 50 and 70 m, one of us (RR) collected eight specimens of *Lepidoblepharis sanctaemartae* (RUTHVEN, 1916) (fig. 1). The specimens were preserved in 10% formalin, transferred to 70% ethanol, and deposited in the Museo de la Estación Biológica de Rancho Grande, estado Aragua, Venezuela (EBRG).

The specimens were active in the leaf litter from 10.00 a.m. to 03.00 p.m. in semi-deciduous forest ("bosque húmedo premontano" in HOLDRIDGE's life zone classification by EWEL et al. 1976) on 13 and 14 November 1996 (EBRG 3318-20, 3324, 3326-28) and on 17 February 1997 (EBRG 3384). This type of forest occurs along piedmont areas north of the Sierra de Perijá in both Venezuela and Colombia (EWEL et al. 1976; SUÁREZ-NAVARRO et al. 1984). If the distribution of this lizard is associated with this forest type, we anticipate its presence farther south in Venezuela, along the eastern versant of the Sierra de Perijá and down at least to the Río Upon. This sierra continues to be poorly known herpetologically (LA MARCA 1987; VILORIA & CALCHI 1993; MANZANILLA et al. 1999). The biogeographical relationships of the Sierra de Perijá to other mountainous areas in northern South America remain uncertain, mainly because of the lack of proper inventories in of the region. Nonetheless, the scarce data available show that some snakes and frogs of the sub-Andean humid forests up to 1000 m, are shared between the Sierra de Perijá and the Venezuelan Cordillera de Mérida (LA MARCA & GARCÍA 1986; LA MARCA 1994A; LA MARCA 1994B; LA MARCA 1998).

No species of amphibians or reptiles from humid montane forests are known to be shared between the Sierra de Perijá and the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta; perhaps this is because of intervening semiarid habitats that may act as an ecological barrier. Some authors (e.g., RUIZ-CARRANZA et al. 1994) have suggested that the Sierra de Perijá has been decisive in the biological colonization of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, its slopes acting in the past as biological corridors for frog genera such as *Geobatrachus* and *Eleutherodactylus*, and even allowing successive invasions of some species (e.g., frogs of the genus *Atelopus*). This would be possible if ancestral stocks

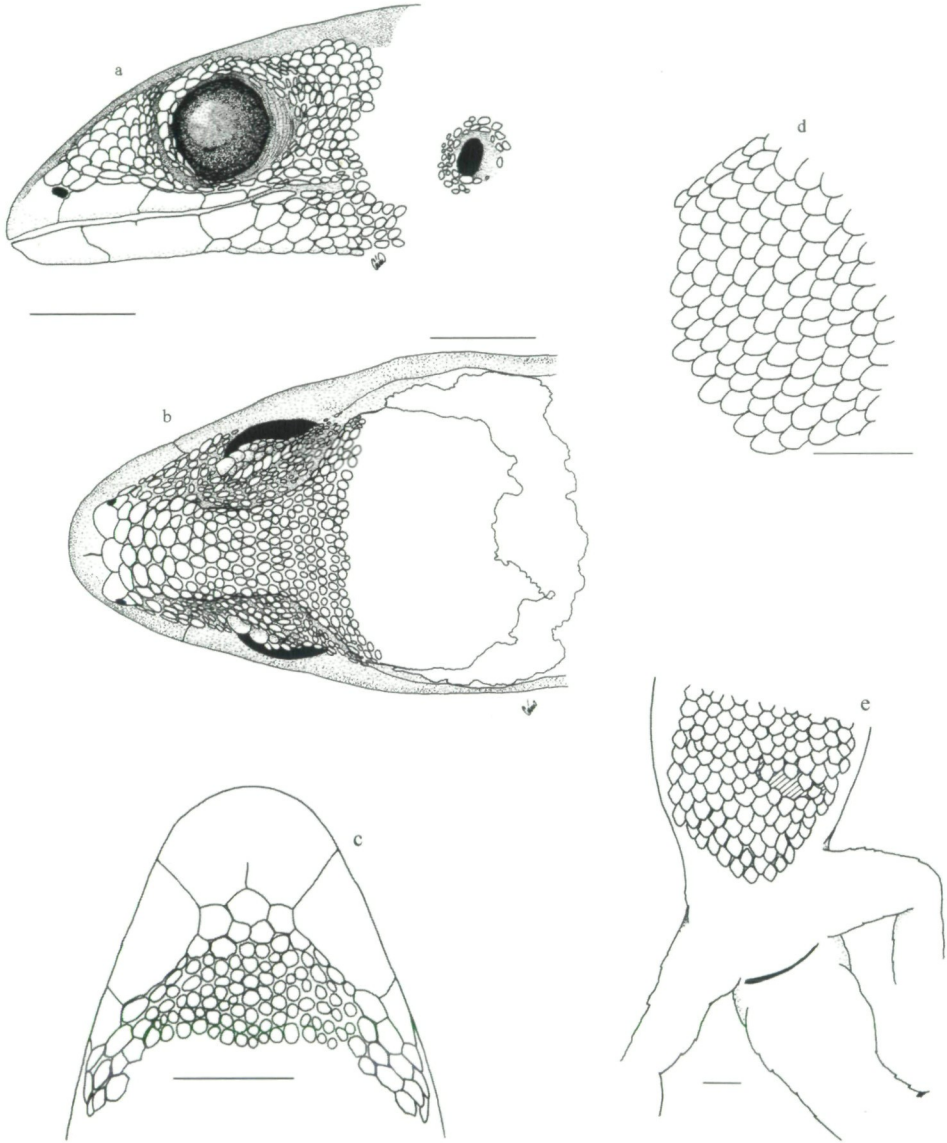


Fig. 1: *Lepidoblepharis sanctaemartae* (RUTHVEN, 1916) (male), EBRG 3328;
a - lateral, b - dorsal, and c - ventral views of the head; d - dorsal scales (midbody);
e - scales on posterior part of belly, showing escutcheon area.
Length of bar represents 1 mm.

originated in the Colombian Cordillera Oriental. The finding of a pair of sister species of frogs (*Eleutherodactylus douglasi* LYNCH, 1996 and *E. delicatus* RUTHVEN, 1917) from Cordillera Oriental de Colombia gives support to this hypothesis (LYNCH et al. 1997). The new record of *L. sanctaemartae* is of interest because it suggests a wider interchange of species between Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta and Sierra de Perijá. However, the herpetofaunal assemblages of the semi-deciduous forests (as well as those from more humid environments) in Sierra de Perijá are poorly known, thus avoiding comparisons. The reptile fauna of the more xeric environments to the north of this locality new to *L. sanctaemartae* is composed of widely distributed species (for a list, see VILORIA & CALCHI 1993) thus rendering them uninformative for biogeographical comparisons.

Lepidoblepharis sanctaemartae was previously known from Panamá (Atlantic versants of Provincias Darién, Colón and Panamá) and lower elevations of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in northeastern Colombia (AYALA 1986; YOUNG et al. 1999). This is the second species of the genus to be found in Venezuela. The previously reported species is the relatively recently described *L. montecanoensis* MARKEZICH & TAPHORN, 1994, which is endemic to xerophytic environments in the Península de Paraguaná, in Falcón State (MARKEZICH & TAPHORN 1994), a locality 250 km (airline) east of the one reported here (Río Guasare, Sierra de Perijá).

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